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The Qualities, Practices, and Theories Held by Award-Winning Second Language College Teachers

Abstract

It is important for second language college teachers to know what kinds of teaching and learning approaches are most effective for their students. This basic qualitative study presents the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their own qualities of excellence, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of learning. The purpose of the study was to identify, describe, and understand these perspectives. Sixteen of such teachers, all of whom had won one or more awards of excellence from professional organizations, were interviewed, and the collected data were analyzed through three levels of coding. The main research question regarding the perspectives was divided into four sub-questions. Themes emerging from the sub-question about qualities of excellence included *loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about best practices in the classroom included the *use of technology in the classroom, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about philosophies of second language teaching included *standards set by teachers' associations, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, use of comprehensible input, and emphasis on improving communication*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about theories of second language learning included *one-size-does-not-fit-all approach, learning through experience, self-directed learning, and organized chaos in the class*. The findings of the study may have future implications for the ways second languages are taught in situations that are similar to the ones described.

Keywords

foreign language education, teachers, philosophy of education, excellence, educational technology, achievement motivation, students

Disciplines

First and Second Language Acquisition | Higher Education | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Comments

- A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty of Capella University in partial fulfillment for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
- Dr. Gail Hughes, Ph.D., Faculty Mentor and Chair
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**THE QUALITIES, PRACTICES, AND THEORIES HELD BY AWARD-
WINNING SECOND LANGUAGE COLLEGE TEACHERS**

by

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Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

It is important for second language college teachers to know what kinds of teaching and learning approaches are most effective for their students. This basic qualitative study presents the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their own qualities of excellence, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of learning. The purpose of the study was to identify, describe, and understand these perspectives. Sixteen of such teachers, all of whom had won one or more awards of excellence from professional organizations, were interviewed, and the collected data were analyzed through three levels of coding. The main research question regarding the perspectives was divided into four sub-questions. Themes emerging from the sub-question about qualities of excellence included *loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about best practices in the classroom included *the use of technology in the classroom, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about philosophies of second language teaching included *standards set by teachers' associations, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, use of comprehensible input, and emphasis on improving communication*. Themes emerging from the sub-question about theories of second language learning included *one-size-does-not-fit-all approach, learning through experience, self-directed learning, and organized chaos in the class*. The findings of the study may have future implications for the ways second languages are taught in situations that are similar to the ones described.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents, Cornelis and Helena Maria van Beek. They were born shortly before the outbreak of World War II in the Netherlands and experienced firsthand what it means to grow up under foreign occupation. In the decades right after the war, they were never given the opportunity to continue their studies after elementary school since they had to contribute to the family income (my father) or stay home and care for an ailing father (my mother). Yet, they wanted more for us, their children, than they had had for themselves. They kept telling us to take full advantage of all the educational opportunities that would come our way, and they would fully support us in those endeavors. Their words of encouragement and their determination to constantly remind me of making the most of my studies, up to this very day, have contributed to where I am right now. And thus, it is with deep love and great appreciation that I dedicate this study to them.

And because Dutch is the language my parents speak, I will now address them in Dutch. “Pa en ma, ik heb net geschreven wat voor een inspiratie jullie voor mij geweest zijn, heel mijn leven lang, om het beste uit mijn studie te halen—‘Werken kan altijd nog’, zei pa altijd. Jullie hebben intens met me meegeleefd en me altijd onvoorwaardelijk gesteund. Daarom draag ik deze dissertatie aan jullie op.”

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I would like to express my appreciation to the 16 award-winning second language teachers who were willing to participate in this study. Taking time out of a busy university schedule at the end of term is hard, and having been in postsecondary education myself for a considerable time now, I know how hectic the end of a semester or the beginning of a summer break can be. Still, those 16 colleagues did not mind being interviewed about their practices. Without them sharing their insights and expertise, this study would not have taken place.

A word of thanks is also in order for my family both close by and far away. They have always believed in me successfully completing this study, which has been a great incentive for me to move on. In addition, thank you to those colleagues at the college where I am currently employed who did not stop showing interest in my progress and encouraging me to continue.

And above all, in the words with which my favorite composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, used to sign his compositions, *SDG, Soli Deo Gloria*: Glory be to God alone!

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

What is known about teaching in general is that its qualities and effects may vary immensely. In addition, there is no consensus as to how teaching can best be evaluated and what makes for excellent teaching (Felder & Brent, 2005). This is especially true for second language teaching at institutions of postsecondary education (Brown & Cumpler, 2013).

The current study has addressed this problem in an unprecedented way. Second language teachers who had received an award of excellence from their peer organizations were interviewed about their own perspectives on their teaching. They were asked to reflect on the qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning they hold that may have contributed to their recognition.

The findings from this study will add to the knowledge base of second language teaching and learning in higher education. Since the field of education in general has changed over the past decades, with an increasing emphasis on online learning, it is to be expected that the ways in which second languages are taught are also changing. It is important for students in the twenty-first century to know that the teaching they receive is no less than excellent. This study will discuss the perspectives held by award-winning second language teachers on important elements of teaching and learning so that current and future colleagues in this field may improve their own teaching and enhance student learning.

Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework for the Problem

In an increasingly competitive world, which does not stop at the gates of college and university campuses, it is important for teachers at those institutions of higher education to know what kinds of teaching and learning approaches are most effective for their students. This is especially true, but not exclusively so, for second language teachers. If the United States wants to keep up with what is happening in the field of second language teaching and learning in the rest of the world, where the need to learn a second, or even a third, language is often perceived to be greater than here, second language instruction has to be excellent nationwide.

Background to the Problem

The question as to what an excellent second language teacher is, is justified. After all, what is this determined by, and by whom? Several studies have been conducted on the topic of teaching excellence and effectiveness in general. Effective teaching can be evaluated, among other things, in terms of the ways in which it stimulates adult learners (Billington, 1996), satisfies students' concerns (Perlman & McCann, 1998), incorporates online learning technologies and tools (Reinhardt & Nelson, 2004; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Tuin, 2006), or matches students' learning styles (Felder & Brent, 2005).

Context for the Problem

Postsecondary education is changing, and one of the most remarkable changes is taking place in the learning environment. Today's students come into the classroom with different expectations, different learning styles, and different skills than those one or two

decades ago. The question is, what ways of teaching can best accommodate this new generation of students?

This researcher has been a second language teacher for thirty years, partly in Western Europe and partly in the United States, and has experienced these student-related changes firsthand. Also in learning materials, there has been a shift in focus, in this case one from a more synthetic approach to a more analytic approach to teaching and learning. With a synthetic approach, students learn the grammatical, lexical, phonological, and functional units of a language step by step. The task of the learner is to synthesize, or put together, the elements that make up the language. The more traditional language teaching methods, the grammar translation method being one of them, fall into this category. The analytic approach, on the other hand, focuses not so much on teaching the component parts of the second language; but rather has the student discover those components through the learning materials by themselves. A content-based form of instruction is an example of this approach, in which the focus is on making the language meaningful and on getting the students to communicate in the second language (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2014).

Although the synthetic and analytic methods differ significantly from each other, many experts believe that there is no single best method for teaching a second language. All those methods have something valuable to offer to both teachers and learners, provided that the teachers are gifted and native or near-native speakers of the language and the students are motivated. The methods should be appropriate for the educational setting in which they are employed and should be fully understood by the teachers who use them (Fromkin et al., 2014).

It was, therefore, important for this study to find out what practices are used by second language teachers who have been recognized as being exceptional by their peers or their students. Second language teachers who struggle with the issue of what method to use for what type of student might benefit from the findings of this study.

Theoretical Framework for the Problem

In a discussion about philosophies of teaching, references to *andragogy* and *heutagogy* cannot be omitted. Malcom Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy in publications in the 1980s (Knowles, 1984). One of the essential elements for teachers in designing programs for adult learners to reckon with is the fact that the self-concept of adult students moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being. In addition, those students prefer to learn things that are immediately applicable and to know why they are learning something. From these assumptions, Knowles drew implications for the design, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities with adult learners.

Another framework that may help understand adult learning better is the concept of *heutagogy*. Heutagogy is a term based on the Greek word for *self* and takes andragogy to a higher level (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). The authors claim that this concept is a natural development out of earlier educational philosophies, in which the students are the major agents in their own learning. In this theory, the role of the teacher is limited to the transfer of knowledge and skills to the students, but the students themselves, and not the teacher, are in control of their own learning (Hase & Kenyon, 2001).

Just as with the philosophies of teaching, there are also a number of theories of learning that contribute to one's understanding of adult learning (Merriam, Caffarella, &

Baumgartner, 2007). Theories that are relevant to the field of second language learning include *self-directed*, *transformational*, *experiential*, *embodied*, *spiritual*, and *narrative learning* approaches. Those learning approaches were constructed or improved by leading thinkers in educational theory. A full discussion of these philosophies and theories can be found in Chapter 2.

Statement of the Problem

As the quality and effectiveness of postsecondary education may vary from one institution to another, there is no consensus as to what the most effective teaching method is, and this is especially true for second language education (Brown & Cumpler, 2013; Felder & Brent, 2005). Although studies have been done in the area of evaluation of teaching, more research is needed to identify the specific qualities and practices award-winning second language teachers have that make them exceptional (Corda & Westhoff, 2010; Felder & Brent, 2004; Gibbs, 1996). Although research had been conducted on the effectiveness of theories of instruction and learning, little is known about the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their own philosophies of teaching and theories of language learning (Brent & Felder, 2004; Elton, 1996; Goldberg, 2003; Ortega, 2009; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Therefore, the problem was a gap in knowledge regarding the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning held by award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. Discovering these perspectives has provided valuable insights into the ways languages are taught and learned at institutions of postsecondary education and may enable current and future educators to establish benchmarks that push second language learning and instruction to a higher level.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional second language teachers in the twenty-first century?

Sub-question 1

What qualities do exceptional second language teachers think they possess that have helped them to excel as second language teachers?

Sub-question 2

What practices do exceptional second language teachers use that they think contribute to their effectiveness?

Sub-question 3

What are the philosophies of teaching used by exceptional second language teachers?

Sub-question 4

What theories of language learning do exceptional second language teachers use?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

This study addresses a problem that is relevant to practitioners in the field of second language teaching in postsecondary education. It has produced significant new knowledge about teaching excellence that is useful for those practitioners. Never before had award-winning second language college teachers from all across the country been interviewed about their profession. There were several areas in which findings emerged that had not been found in the reviewed literature.

Rationale for the Study

It may be safe to assume that all teachers want to be excellent in their field. There are those who have been recognized as such by their peers or their professional organizations and have won awards for excellence, and those who have not. The question is, what makes the former teachers excellent? Research has been done in the area of second language teaching in general, but not in the area of second language learning and instruction related to award-winning teachers.

Gibbs (1996), Gregory (1996), and Elton (1996) published several studies on standards of excellence in teaching in general. Gibbs came up with the following criteria of excellence: expertise in the discipline, professional and communication skills, enthusiasm and capability to motivate, orientation to students, organizational skills, quality of assessment and feedback, and openness to reflection and change. Gregory proposed that the criteria of teaching excellence include: preparation for teaching, quality

of delivery of teaching, volume and range of teaching, innovation in teaching, general communications with students, assessment/examination procedures, evaluation of his or her own teaching, management of teaching, teaching scholarship and research, teaching and the world of work. In addition, Elton referred to teaching criteria such as invitations to teach elsewhere, membership in professional groups, professional service to other universities and organizations, publications on teaching, and teaching grants and contracts secured.

This study is grounded in the field of postsecondary education since 16 award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education were interviewed about their qualities, practices, and theories of language learning and instruction.

Relevance of the Study

Suppose all exceptional second language teachers show great similarity in their choices of instructional methods at institutions of postsecondary education. This may impact the ways in which new instructional materials will be designed in the future in order to benefit learners at those institutions.

However, the actual classroom environment may present a more complex picture. According to Fromkin et al. (2014), “actual classroom practices tend to be more eclectic, with teachers using techniques that work well for them and to which they are accustomed—even if these techniques are not in complete accordance with the method they are practicing” (p. 313).

In any event, knowing how award-winning second language teachers choose their effective practices in connection with the special qualities they possess may provide a

sound basis to design more effective instruction and help establish benchmarks that push second language learning and instruction to a higher level.

Significance of the Study

The study has led to a better understanding of the theories of language learning and instruction used by exceptional second language teachers at institutions of higher education. According to Fromkin et al. (2014), “second-language teaching methods fall into two broad categories: the *synthetic* approach and the *analytic* approach” (p. 312; italics in original). The synthetic approach is a bottom-up method whereby the learner is taught the grammatical, lexical, phonological, and functional units of the target language step by step, which he or she then puts together. The analytic approach is a top-down method whereby the learner is not taught the component parts or rules of the target language but through immersion tries to extract the rules of the language, which is similar to a child learning its native language. Those two methods should be looked upon as “the opposite ends of a continuum along which various second-language methods may fall” (Fromkin et al., 2014, p. 313). Also, the different ways in which the various language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are included in the method may have an impact on student learning.

Brown and Cumpler (2013) claim there is no consensus as to what an effective teaching method is in the field of second language education. This study may begin to close this gap in knowledge and offer viable avenues for further research, based on the information given by award-winning second language teachers.

Nature of the Study

This basic qualitative study was designed and implemented in accordance with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015). The focus was on identifying, describing, and understanding what makes excellent second language teachers excellent. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews of second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education.

Sixteen recipients of awards of excellence were selected through purposeful sampling—for the minimum number of 12 participants in an interview research design meeting the saturation criteria, see Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) and Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007). The interviews, lasting 45 minutes on average, were recorded with permission and fully transcribed. According to Patton (2015), “during the interviewing process itself . . . the purpose of the interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective. Some method for recording the verbatim responses of people being interviewed is therefore essential” (pp. 471-472). This view that “verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis” is supported by Merriam (2009, p. 110).

According to Merriam (2009), “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). “The purpose of interviewing, then,” Patton (2015) claims, “is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 426). Participants were chosen from different colleges and universities nationwide, which made it virtually impossible to observe them in their actual teaching environment. The interviews were scheduled via email and conducted

over the phone or via Skype. Participants were given the chance to review the transcript of the interview before the data were analyzed so as to allow for corrections.

Definition of Terms

In order to avoid potential ambiguity and vagueness, some important terms are defined, especially those that have been used in the research questions and in the literature review.

Analytic Approach

The analytic approach to second language teaching is defined as a method that focuses on the student extracting the rules of a language from the authentic materials that are offered in class (Fromkin et al., 2014).

Award-Winning Teachers

Award-winning teachers are defined in the study as those individuals who have received an award of excellence from their institutions or peer organizations.

Content-Based Instruction

Content-based instruction is defined as an analytic approach of second language instruction, in which the focus is on making the language meaningful and on getting the learner to communicate in the target language, all of which is based on using authentic learning materials (Fromkin et al., 2014).

Philosophies of Teaching

Philosophies of teaching are defined as those principles of instruction and learning that center around the role of the teacher.

Second Language Teachers

Second language teachers are defined as instructors and professors who teach students a language that is different from the students' native language, which may be their second or third language.

Self-Reported Practices

Self-reported practices are defined as the best practices that are part of the philosophies of teaching and theories of language learning used by the interviewees.

Self-Reported Qualities

Self-reported qualities are defined in the study as those qualities that teachers recognize in themselves as have been instrumental in their being recognized for their excellence.

Synthetic Approach

The synthetic approach to second language learning is defined as a method that focuses on teaching the various grammatical parts one by one, in which the students put all those pieces together (Fromkin et al., 2014).

Theories of Language Learning

Theories of language learning are defined as those principles of learning which center around the role of the learner or student.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It is important to identify the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations connected to the study. Assumptions are those aspects of the study that were taken for

granted by the researcher, limitations reflect the potential weaknesses the study might have, and delimitations show the extent to which the study was narrowed down.

Assumptions

According to Merriam (2009), interviewing is a valid way of doing educational research, through which observations and developing insights, together with data collection, sharpen and refine the knowledge base of the field of education. It was assumed that insights emerging out of these interviews would lead to a better understanding of the application of the theories of language learning and instruction practiced by exceptional teachers working in postsecondary education. In addition, award-winning language teachers seemed to be the ideal informants in a study on exceptional methods of learning and instruction, since they have been recognized by their peers as leaders in their field. Furthermore, language teachers from a variety of different languages and different school cultures were invited to participate on the assumption that more diversity would lead to a better understanding of the research problem.

A basic qualitative study with an interview data collection method is supposed to need a minimum of 12 participants to meet the saturation criteria (Guest et al., 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Another assumption underlying the study included the truthfulness and validity of the responses given by the interviewees regarding their own qualities, best practices, and their theories of learning and instruction. Internal validity was assumed to be ensured through clarification of researcher bias and through peer examination by colleagues and the dissertation committee (Merriam, 2009).

Limitations

Qualitative studies in general describe specific situations and events and do not lend themselves to generalizations common in quantitative studies. In the current exploratory research study, transferability of the findings will be limited to exceptional second language teachers. This is what Patton (2015) refers to as “internal generalization” (p. 719), a kind of transferability that can apply to teachers in similar situations who were not interviewed.

Delimitations

The population was limited to award-winning second language teachers, which implies that second language teachers who have not been awarded were not included in the study, although they might be excellent in their field.

The literature reviewed does not focus on studies done in language classes at institutions of primary or secondary education, since the topic relates to postsecondary education. Also, the languages in which the literature was published were limited to English and Dutch, based on the academic reading skills of the researcher.

Finally, there were no actual observations of classes given by award-winning teachers, or face-to-face interviews with them, mainly because of geographical and budgetary reasons. The targeted sample included teachers from colleges and universities who are spread out over the entire country.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 will present the theoretical framework for the study, as well as present, analyze, synthesize, and critique the relevant literature related to second language

teaching and learning. Chapter 3 will describe the research design and the data collection methodology selected to address the problem and answer the research questions. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the data that have been collected. The completed dissertation will conclude with Chapter 5, which will include (a) a summary of the findings, (b) a discussion of these findings, (c) the relationship of the findings to the reviewed literature, (d) the implications of the findings for practice, and (e) recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their own qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. The teachers who were selected to participate in the study had received an award of excellence from their peers in teacher organizations and worked at institutions of postsecondary education. Knowing what makes those exceptional teachers stand out may help fellow practitioners in the field of second language teaching improve their instruction, in the same way as athletes can learn from Olympic gold medalists about their qualities, practices, philosophies of life, and theories of nutrition in order to improve their own performances. In addition, it was expected that the findings of this study would add to the knowledge base of second language education.

After a brief discussion of the theoretical framework on which this study is founded, the literature review will present, analyze, synthesize, and critique earlier studies related to second language teaching and instruction. In this review, methodological choices will also be addressed.

Deciding on a special theoretical framework for a qualitative study is no easy matter, one of the reasons being that there is no consensus on how to categorize these frameworks. Patton (2015) recommends making “your own decision about the relative value of any given inquiry framework and perspective based on your own interests, theoretical preferences, intellectual tradition, and inquiry context” (p. 164). The central

research question for the study has been generated by the theoretical framework of teaching excellence at institutions of postsecondary education. Teaching excellence is rooted in philosophies of teaching and theories of language learning, in combination with best practices and qualities.

The literature review is organized around the four themes that reflect the central research question, *What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional second language teachers in the twenty-first century?*, as well as around the chosen research methodology. In order of appearance, the first theme discussed is *philosophies of teaching*, which highlights important theories that are particularly relevant for second language instruction, such as andragogy and heutagogy. The second theme, *theories of language learning*, presents an overview of various learning approaches that are available to second language teachers, including experiential and transformational learning. Both the third theme, *teaching excellence qualities*, and the fourth theme, *best practices*, look at possible reasons why teachers may have been evaluated as being excellent in their fields. Because of the available studies, this review is not only limited to second language teachers but will also include high-ranking teachers' qualities and practices from across the disciplines in postsecondary education. The methodological review will discuss literature on the choice for a basic qualitative study conducted through interviews.

In the search for relevant literature, the libraries of Capella University, Dordt College, and Leiden University were accessed. The databases consulted via the services of those libraries include Academic Search Premier, Christian Periodical Index, Dissertations @ Capella, DOAJ, EBL, eBooks on EBSCOhost, Education Research

Complete, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR Archival Journals, Project MUSE, ProQuest Education Journals, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, SAGE Journals Online, Teacher Reference Center, University Library, and Wiley Online Library. Other relevant articles on national and international teachers' organizations, and individual universities and colleges, as well as certain educational websites were found through Google Internet searches. The key terms used in the search reflect the themes from the literature review, such as *philosophies of instruction, theories of learning, theories of language learning, teaching excellence, best practices, andragogy, heutagogy, analytical approach to language learning, synthetic approach to language learning, teaching excellence awards, online teaching in higher education, and qualitative interview studies.*

Theoretical Framework

According to Chomsky (1972) and Langer (2009), language is one of the major elements that sets humans apart from animals. In addition to responding to the environment, which humans and animals to a certain extent have in common, human beings are also able to think *about* things that are not present and be creative with language in abstractions, ideas, and imageries that go beyond what animals will ever be able to achieve. Chomsky claims that this “creative aspect of language use” (1972, p. 11) manifests itself in the sense that we are able not only to *understand* sentences we have never heard before but also to *speak* sentences we have never uttered before. According to Langer, “languages . . . grow with our need for expression” (2009, p. 81), which is a relevant inference in connection with second language learning. Learners of a language will become more fluent, and hence more confident with it, when they take their studies

to a higher level. As a result, their language will grow. Exceptional teachers will help their students develop in that direction.

Second language learning is fundamentally different from first language learning. To be precise, one's first language is not really "learned," if by learning we mean the normal associations we have with this process, such as having a teacher, a student, and learning materials (Films, 2004). A human who is exposed to his or her first language as an infant does not really have a choice but to acquire it. Parents, siblings, and friends usually provide enough language materials the child's mind absorbs as a sponge and on the basis of that constructs its own grammar. After having been exposed to the language for four or five years, a human will be a fluent speaker of this language without any formal instruction. This is something universal in the sense that people all over the world "learn" to speak their native language(s) in the same way.

The process of acquiring a second language a little later in life, on the other hand, is quite different. This usually happens in an educational environment, whether that is through face-to-face classroom instruction or via an online courseroom. For it to be successful, one normally needs a qualified instructor who helps the student learn the language, a motivated student who puts enough time and effort into the learning, and appropriate course materials that help facilitate the learning (Fromkin et al., 2014). One of those three aspects, namely that of the instructor, was the focus of this study.

According to Gay (1996), "educational research findings significantly contribute to both educational theory and educational practice" (p. 2). Because of this, the current basic qualitative study was not only rooted in the framework of second language education but has also contributed to it. The study can also be qualified as exploratory,

since it will be, as it were, scratching the surface of excellent second language education. As far as the strengths of qualitative research methods are concerned, one could think of the cooperative nature of the study in the sense that participants may influence the research process if they wish, and the possibility that the researcher may start to “see the world through the eyes of the participants” (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 15).

One of the ways in which we would be able to see the world through somebody else’s eyes is also by studying other languages and cultures than the one we grew up with. In today’s world, most connections may be made through the Internet, in which English seems to be the dominant language, but once one sets foot on the soil of another country, that comfort of being able to use English everywhere one goes seems to disappear very soon. It often takes learning somebody else’s language in order to be able to reach out to that person as well.

We must get the message across that there is a world standard for global communication. Though English may be the symbol of that standard, for others, *the heart of that standard is not English, but rather bilingualism and cross-cultural communication*. Though we might think of it as an advantage, the spread of Global English has become a national handicap for us, for it has given us a false sense of security and actually clouded our understanding of the world beyond our borders. . . . It denies us access to the innermost world or the personal world of our partners from other cultures. It translates into ignorance and loss of power. (Grandin, 2006, p. 184; italics in original)

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The literature review is divided into four main sections: (a) a discussion and analysis of significant literature on teaching excellence, built around the four themes that are reflected in the central research question: *What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional*

second language teachers in the twenty-first century?, (b) a review of methodological issues, (c) a synthesis of the research findings, and (d) a critique of previous research.

Discussion and Analysis of Literature on Teaching Excellence

Philosophies of teaching. A large portion of college and university students in this country, some researchers say half of them, are adults (Wlodkowski, 2008). “The foremost challenge of education and training, at every level and in every venue, is to create equitable and successful learning environments for *all* learners” (p. 44; italics in original). A language program, or in the words of Argyris and Schön (1974), “a theory-in-use, is effective when action according to the theory tends to achieve its governing variables.” (p. 24). Therefore, the question is justified what kinds of variables, what kinds of elements that characterize second language teaching are relevant for all groups of students in postsecondary education. A number of educators have made valuable contributions to the knowledge base of learning in general. Among those are Malcom Knowles, Knud Illeris, Peter Jarvis, Chris Kenyon, and Stewart Hase.

Knowles’s concept of andragogy. “Andragogy focuses on the adult learner and his or her life situation” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 83). Initially, Knowles, who wrote his major publications in the 1970s-1980s, contrasted the European concept of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn, with pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn. Knowles distinguished a number of assumptions as essential to designing programs for this type of learners, including (a) their self-concept moves from dependence toward self-directedness when they mature; (b) their experience gained during their life is a great resource for learning; (c) their time perspective on when to apply what has been learned moves from the future to the here and now; (d) their internal

motivations are stronger than their external ones; and (e) they want to know why they have to learn something (Merriam et al., 2007). These assumptions had implications for Knowles's design, implementation, and evaluation of learning activities with these students. Knowles wanted to set adult learning apart from childhood education.

Illeris's three-dimensional model. In Illeris's instructional model, there are three dimensions involved in learning: cognition (knowledge, skills), emotion (feelings, motivation), and environment (participation, communication). In every learning activity, there is always an interaction of these three dimensions with the particular social context in which they occur, the society in which we live (Illeris, 2003). The process of learning begins with five basics: perception, transmission, experience, imitation, and activity or participation. The fact that Illeris included emotional and social dimensions in his model was seen as a strength (Merriam et al., 2007; Poscente, 2006).

Regarding social context and community participation, equipping students with insight into how to best serve the community with their talents is an important goal of teaching and learning. Students need to experience in second language courses that they are taught things they can give back to their own communities, so institutions of postsecondary education need to equip their students with what some call "serviceable insight" (Dordt College, 1996, p. 9).

Jarvis's learning process. According to Jarvis, all learning begins with experience, which may include negative educational experiences and discrepancies between biography and experience (Jarvis, 2006). He defines experience as "an incident that a person is unprepared to handle" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 100). His theory includes both body and mind in the learning process. In fact, all five human sensations are equally

important: sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch. It is important for the instructor, therefore, to provide learning opportunities for the students in which those sensations are transformed into knowledge, skills, values, and emotions.

As a result of those learning opportunities, the student is changed. One way in which this could be manifested is that the student may attach new meaning to the world and become more experienced to handle similar situations outside the classroom. This puts high demands on the organization of instruction in the second language classroom. Instructors who teach their students an entirely new language need to offer this language in relation to its cultural context. In this way, students will become familiar with the habits and cultural phenomena of the target culture, and by making them their own, they are changed, transformed. Looking at events from the perspective of another culture also has an impact on the way they look at their own culture.

Hase and Kenyon's concept of heutagogy. *Heutagogy* is a term coined by Chris Kenyon and based on the Greek word for *self* (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). This theory describes the concept of truly self-determined learning, particularly relevant in the development of the student's individual capability. This theory of heutagogy, developed with fellow educator Stewart Hase from Southern Cross University, Australia, poses serious challenges to the role of the teacher in the classroom environment (Hase & Kenyon, 2001).

Heutagogy has the potential of double loop learning in the sense that it “involves the challenging of our ‘theories in use,’ our values and our assumptions rather than simply reacting to problems with strategies found in single loop learning” (Hase & Kenyon, 2001, p. 4). Not only do learners try to find a solution to a problem in this kind

of learning, but they also look at the way in which they reached their conclusions. In order to successfully achieve this, they need to look at their own assumptions and how these changed in the course of the learning process (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 38). This self-reflection on their learning is essential for students in a heutagogical theory.

The authors make a clear distinction between knowledge and skill acquisition, which can be acquired and reproduced, and learning, which happens at a deeper cognitive level (Hase & Kenyon, 2007; McAuliffe, Hargreaves, Winter, & Chadwick, 2008). They see practical applications of heutagogy in, for instance, education and many online learning opportunities, including learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction through chat rooms and e-mail lists (Hase & Kenyon, 2001). This approach has strong links to the self-directed and experiential ways of learning discussed below and to emphases on holistic attributes and creativity in learning.

Theories of language learning.

Modern cognitive theories assume that humans learn by interacting with their environment. This process which involves both the person's previous knowledge and the environmental stimuli is seen as a constructive process. During this interactive process new knowledge is constructed and learned, and then integrated into the previous knowledge. The results of such knowledge constructions are always more than the sum of the environmental percepts; they are new concepts which cannot be foreseen. So learning is not adding information to information already stored, but constructing new knowledge. In a way every learning process can be seen as a creative process. (Marsh, Baetens Beardsmore, de Bot, Mehisto, & Wolff, 2009, p. 13)

“There is no single theory of adult learning. Instead, we have a number of frameworks, or models, each of which contributes something to our understanding of adults as learners” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 83). The theories and principles of learning selected for analysis are those that show apparent relevance to the field of second

language learning and were constructed or improved by important theorists in education. The different ways of learning that will be discussed range from self-directed, transformational, experiential, embodied, to narrative perspectives.

Self-directed learning. Gerald Grow's model of integrating self-directed learning lists four different stages of learning: dependent learners, interested learners, involved learners, and self-directed learners (Grow, 1991/1996; Merriam et al., 2007). All those types of students tend to be part of the second language courses in general. When students start learning a second language, especially in a face-to-face classroom, they are very dependent on their teacher as the model to imitate. The more they learn about the language and the culture, the more they develop from dependent learners, through interested and involved learners, to the stage of self-directed learners where they can do individual projects in the target language. Along with this, the role of the teacher changes from authority coach, through motivator and facilitator, to that of consultant.

Transformational learning. Transformational learning happens when students change, transform some of their attitudes, beliefs, or perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). In this type of learning, students go through the main components of the personal transformative learning process that Jack Mezirow characterizes as "experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 134).

Similarly, students learning a second language grow in their understanding of the culture they are studying with the language. They often need to be made aware of their own (often unconscious) prejudices towards other cultures and the different ways in which other cultures look at North American culture (Hudelson & Faltis, 1993). When these students take courses in another country, which is mandatory in many second

language college programs, they experience firsthand how different the same types of classes may be conducted in another culture (Osa, 2010).

Experiential learning. “Clearly the role of experience in learning is highly complex” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 169). There are many theories of experiential learning, and they all have in common that learning can happen through experience as much as through the formal educational process. Two theories have been selected, based on their applicability to second language learning: a constructivist and a situative theory of learning.

The *constructive* theory of learning approach focuses on the concrete experience of the learner. Reflecting on these experiences, learners construct new knowledge and new meaning (Fenwick, 2003). In this process, teachers function as “facilitators of reflection and encourage learners to discuss and reflect on concrete experiences in a trusting, open environment” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 169). In the field of second language learning, students are challenged to revisit their own attitudes about certain languages and cultures, which may also be reflective of the attitudes and biases they have about the people who speak those languages. Therefore, it is essential for students to learn to view cultures, of which people and languages are a part, from multiple perspectives, not just their own. In this way, new learning can be constructed (Mandell & Herman, 2008).

The *situative* theory of learning approach focuses on getting the learner involved in a community of practice: “Knowing is intertwined with doing” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 160). Students need to participate in situations whereby knowledge is fostered. One aspect of this type of learning is participating in service learning projects. Students

involved in those projects can practice their second language fluency and at the same time serve their immigrant neighbors, for instance, by providing free tutorials in English to those families. This would be one of the “real situations in which the learners participate” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 170).

Embodied learning. Tara Amann’s four-part model of somatic, or embodied, learning lists four dimensions, which can be applied to the study of languages as well: kinesthetic, sensory, affective, and spiritual learning (Amann, 2003; Merriam et al., 2007). Also Hadley (2001) referred to some of these dimensions.

Kinesthetic learning is learning through movement and action. Within this learning methodology, the Total Physical Response approach (TPR) gained a lot of popularity. It was developed by James J. Asher in the 1960s and offers a stress-free way of learning new languages. Asher (1993) claims the method he proposed is a “memorable learning experience—a learning experience that creates teacher-of-the-year awards” (p. 3-38). In this way of learning, the teacher gives commands to the students in the new language, who then, after observing a model act, learn very quickly to perform the actions intended themselves. Through various experiments, “those who *acted* in the demonstrations of retention outperformed those who *wrote English translations* to show their retention” (Asher, 1993, p. 1-34; italics in original). That this teaching method may pose problems to second language students in the Middle East, is discussed by Majid Al-Humaidi (n.d.), faculty member at King Saud University, Saudi Arabia.

Sensory learning may take place on site, when students are in a foreign country and smell and taste the products or the flowers, which they had only read about in books up to that point. Then the senses definitely add to the learning process. Affective

learning adds an emotional dimension to learning, and in Amann's view, spiritual learning overlaps the other three dimensions to a great extent (Amann, 2003).

Narrative learning. Narrative methods of learning are widely used in modern second language curricula. Many of these methods can be related to Rossiter and Clark's identification of three main ways of using narrative in practice: "the use of stories in teaching and learning; storying the curriculum; and making autobiographical connections with the course content" (2007, p. 71). Narrative learning is extremely relevant and stimulating in language studies to capture students' attention. With it, learners can better understand the content of their learning materials, as well as better understand themselves and the world they live in. Through narratives, we can make sense of our experiences in this world, which is one of the main aspects of learning (Merriam et al., 2007).

Qualities of Excellence. As was the case with philosophies of instruction and theories of learning, qualities of excellence and best practices are also closely connected in an educational context. Learning a second language at an institution of postsecondary education usually happens with the help of an instructor. Several studies have been conducted on the topic of teacher evaluation in higher education. They were usually done in a general sense, that is, involving teachers from all sorts of disciplines. Very little research has been done on the topic of teaching excellence with second language instructors. Attention will also be devoted to professional organizations and individual institutions of postsecondary education that issue awards of excellence on an annual basis, sometimes for the teaching profession as a whole, sometimes narrowed down to teachers of second, or foreign, languages.

Studies. Gibbs (1996) looked at earlier studies of teaching excellence both in the United Kingdom and the United States and found that, although most of the institutions seemed to have developed solid methodologies for rewarding exceptional teachers, few of those institutions actually gave any prominence to teaching. He raised relevant questions about this process of rewarding excellent teachers, including what criteria should be used for evaluating teaching, what evidence should be reviewed, and who would be the right people to make the final decision. In the United States, teacher evaluation is often, albeit not exclusively, based on student course evaluations, many of which “have little to do with quality of learning processes or outcomes” (Gibbs, 1996, p. 44). The author researched the promotion process at Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom, and found that the following seven standards of excellence were used by reviewers there: (a) expertise in the discipline, (b) professional and communication skills, (c) enthusiasm and capability to motivate, (d) orientation to students, (e) organizational skills, (f) quality of assessment and feedback, (g) and openness to reflection and change.

Gregory (1996) investigated the criteria for teaching excellence that had been formulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. These 15 criteria include (a) preparation for teaching, (b) quality of delivery of teaching, (c) volume and range of teaching, (d) innovation in teaching, (e) general communication with students, (f) assessment/examination procedures, (g) evaluation of one’s own teaching, (h) management of teaching, (i) teaching scholarship and research, (j) teaching and the world of work, (k) invitations to teach elsewhere, (l) membership of professional groups, (m) professional service to other universities and organizations, (n) publications on teaching,

and (o) teaching grants and contracts secured. All of these 15 main criteria were divided into two to six subsections as well.

Elton (1996) investigated the differences between competence and excellence in teaching, and posed that students in general are probably satisfied with competent teachers, in contrast to appalling professionals. In his study, the author first focused on criteria for competence: “There is no quicker way of improving the total quality experience of student learning than by bringing the incompetent to the level of the competent” (Elton, 1996, p. 34). These criteria for competence can be found in the fields of (a) organization, (b) presentation, (c) relationships, (d) assessment, and (e) evaluation. Criteria for excellence add on to these five fields. According to the author, an excellent teacher should be (a) highly competent, thus referring back to the previous criteria, (b) a reflective practitioner, (c) an innovative teacher, (d) a curriculum designer, (e) a course organizer, (f) a pedagogic researcher, and (g) a leading member of a team. Elton also expressed concerns for the grounds on which awards for excellence are distributed, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

An exceptional teacher quality not addressed in the studies above is that of servant leadership. Erik Hoekstra, president of a private college in Iowa, strongly believes that teachers who present themselves to their students as servant leaders, may be able of leading them in ways never thought of before. According to Hoekstra (2010), “leadership is not a position; it is a frame of mind. Leading happens when someone sees an opportunity to serve and steps forth in faith to change or improve a situation.” And Sergiovanni (2007) adds to this that “all the members of a community share the burden of servant leadership” (p. 80). The literature shows that many cases in which servant

leadership has been practiced by exceptional teachers, the student learning experience has been enhanced, whether this was practiced by a public school principal (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007), by a teacher of troubled and troubling youth (Herman & Marlowe, 2005), by a trainer of at-risk teenagers (Grothaus, 2004), or by a college instructor (Bowman, 2005).

In terms of the qualities of excellence especially relevant for second language teachers, Schrier (1993) comes to five salient qualities: (a) proficiency in a world language and culture, (b) proficiency in the language and culture of the school and community they serve, (c) experts in curricular design and implementation, (d) technologically sophisticated, and (e) thoroughly grounded in a solid general education. According to Schrier, the quality of having expertise in curricular design and implementation is “all-subsuming. It implies a degree of sophistication in the knowledge base of foreign language pedagogy that is both theoretical and clinical” (1993, p. 118).

Colleges and universities. There are institutions of postsecondary education that issue their own awards of excellence to outstanding faculty. These colleges and universities usually have an open competition whereby faculty members can be nominated by their colleagues and students if they meet certain criteria. At the University of Utah, for example, distinguished teaching awards can be extended to faculty members with more than eight years of service, recognizing “outstanding teaching, innovative pedagogy, concern for students, and exemplary contributions to the educational process outside the classroom” (University of Utah, n.d.).

By way of comparison, two universities outside of the United States are discussed regarding the ways in which they extend awards of teaching excellence. In the

description of their College Teaching Awards, University College Dublin, Ireland, specifies a clear link between the teachers' philosophy of instruction and their theories of learning. Nominees for the award are selected on the basis of the level to which teaching philosophy has been developed, the level to which this teaching philosophy has been applied successfully, and the level to which feedback has been used to inform the nominee's teaching practice. In addition, aspects of best practices are reviewed in the selection process, as nominees are evaluated on their "effective teaching, learning, and assessment strategies" as well as on their demonstration of understanding student learning needs and their display of motivating students to learn (University College Dublin, n.d.).

At Leiden University, the Netherlands, the annual Leiden Student Council Teaching Prize is awarded to the best teacher of the year by a jury consisting of both faculty members and student union representatives. This jury looks closely at the nominations from the various departments, divisions, and student unions with the help of ten criteria, among which are (a) the teacher actively promotes academic curiosity, passion, and independent academic thinking among students; (b) the teacher teaches a curriculum that is inspired by research and that actively encourages students to get involved in academic research; (c) the teacher approaches students at their level of independent thinking, encourages their intrinsic motivation, and gives students the opportunity to take control over the development of their own talents; and (d) the teacher encourages students to generate award-winning academic work and publications. One Leiden University teaching award per year is bestowed on the professor who best meets

the criteria, and this individual can come from any department. During the past 15 years, four award winners were second language teachers (Universiteit Leiden, 2013).

Professional organizations. Next to colleges and universities, there are also professional organizations that encourage exceptional teachers with awards of excellence. The Online Learning Consortium issues Excellence in Online Teaching Awards to outstanding teachers who have creatively utilized appropriate Internet-based technologies to teach online and/or blended courses in higher education. The recipients must have designed and taught online or blended courses with a creative approach, created well-designed course materials, used appropriate instructional strategies, and demonstrated rapport with the learners. The recipients must also be able to document effectiveness in achieving desired learning outcomes in the online or blended courses (Online Learning Consortium, 2016).

Two of the best-known national associations of second language teachers are the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Both of them issue teaching awards of excellence on an annual basis to teachers of foreign, or second, languages only. The ADFL, a subdivision of the Modern Language Association, chooses one winner per year out of nominations for the Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession, honoring “contributions to teaching, scholarship, and service in foreign languages at the postsecondary level. The committee [seeks] to recognize the exceptional contributions of individuals among all ADFL’s members’ languages, areas of specialization, and institutional divisions: two-year colleges and BA-, MA-, and PhD-granting departments” (ADFL, 2016).

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) extends two different sorts of awards to exceptional teachers every year: the National Language Teacher of the Year Award, and the ACTFL/Cengage Learning Faculty Development Programs Award for Excellence in Foreign Language Instruction using Technology with the International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) in Higher Education. The National Language Teacher of the Year Award is given to a nominee who is a full-time language educator who spends at least fifty-percent of their time in direct teaching during the year of application with an expectation of teaching during the next two years (ACTFL, 2016). The ACTFL/Cengage award is presented to the nominee who has scored best on specified criteria, including (a) innovative approach that integrates technology into the course, (b) rationale for use of technology to attain learning outcomes, and (c) demonstrated improvement of student learning through use of technology (ACTFL, 2015).

The World Language Association, or the Foreign Language Association as they are sometimes called, have divisions per state, which also present excellence of teaching awards to second language teachers (Foreign Language Associations, n.d.). Very often, they have separate awards for high school teachers and for postsecondary teachers, and the nomination criteria are very similar to those of the ADFL, discussed earlier.

Best Practices. Most second language teachers will ask themselves three questions: (a) What should our language majors and minors know? (b) How can they best learn these things? (c) How can we measure our effectiveness at teaching them? (Frye, 1999). There are many best practices discussed in the paragraphs below that apply to

learning and instruction in general. Applications will be made to second language learning whenever appropriate.

Motivation. Since the brain is connected to the rest of the nervous system, this implies that when learning occurs through the brain, the senses such as emotions will also be involved. Thus, instructors have to make sure to create a learning environment that fully incorporates these emotions. When students notice their learning has an impact on what they know and can do, “their intrinsic motivations surfaces like a cork rising through the water” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 20). It is therefore essential for teachers to make sure that whatever needs to be learned in their courses can be learned in a motivating way, and next, that “every instructional plan also needs to be a motivational plan” (Wlodkowski, 2008, pp. 46-47). Student motivation can further be fostered by designing assessment activities that are relevant to them and challenge them to apply what they have learned (Davidson-Shivers & Rasmussen, 2006). Additional consideration could be given to “the needs and learning objectives students identified at the start of the course” when it comes to assessing their work (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 214), a strategy also recommended by Angelo and Cross (1993).

Innovation. Wing (1993) described the importance of developing a coherent vision, especially in view of the challenges the 21st century will place on second language education: “Too often, what happens in classrooms reflects a perpetuation of the past rather than a vision for the future” (p. 160). Because the teaching of second languages is in many respects unique within the profession of teaching, it is therefore important that new ways of teaching those languages are continually developed.

Repetition. Knowing how the adult brain functions is important for instructors. When we learn new words, “connections containing that information are made between neurons. Through practice and repetition, we strengthen the connections and ‘learn’” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 11). Not until we understand the biological development taking place when the learner is absorbing new ideas and concepts do we see the need for repetition and practice. It is essential for instruction to build on prior knowledge, because only then can the biological connections essential to learning and retaining the information or skills be successfully established. Students in second language classes need instructors who are native or near-native speakers of that language so that they can model after them. In this way, the classroom becomes the ideal place “for structured learning that first sets the stage and later reinforces and builds on learning absorbed in study abroad” (Modern Language Association, 2007, p. 243).

Simulations. One of the ways to practice those repeated structures for real is through simulations. The main advantage of simulations is that through them, students are active participants instead of passive observers (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006; Palomba & Banta, 1999). It is very motivating for students to realize they are processing real-life situations, which they can put into practice when they are on their own (Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

Assessment. “Assessment for improvement is a must” (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 69). In line with the application of principles of best practices in learner-centered assessment, it is necessary to schedule ongoing assessment activities of student performance throughout the semester. How can teachers measure how effective their instruction has been? Angelo and Cross (1993) suggest that instructors first need to

identify for themselves what exactly they are trying to teach in a given course. Next, “if [students] are to become self-directed lifelong learners, they also need instruction and practice in self-assessment” (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 9). Students need to practice assessing their own strengths and weaknesses in order to gain insight into what they can and cannot do well in a given area (Gronlund & Waugh, 2009). Providing prompt and constructive feedback will help teachers keep their students motivated as well (University of Maryland, 2016).

Overseas connections. In terms of cross-cultural learning, there are multiple options for students to interact with fellow students overseas. If a study-abroad exchange program is not feasible for them because of financial reasons, for instance, teachers could set up interactive programs on social media through which their students can practice their second language fluency. Both Redden (2010) and Wang, Song, Stone, and Yan (2009) looked at joint programs between American and Chinese universities and discussed some of the differences between the two educational cultures. In both, however, the rapid evolution of digital media has also enabled teachers to find new ways to integrate technology into their classrooms through which their students can share their language and culture with their overseas counterparts in a rather easy way.

Cross-cultural understanding. When students plan a semester abroad as part of their second language study program, the instructor needs to prepare them ahead of time for the differences in cultures, so that they are aware of things they might take for granted but which may be really foreign to the locals (Ziegahn, 2000). Otherwise, they may end up in embarrassing situations based on ignorance of local attitudes and customs (Smith & Carvill, 2000). Instructors can help their students understand those differences better and

thus provide rich insights into the new culture. It is not until the students are actually in the foreign country itself, however, that they begin to understand more fully the implications of living there. They now, as it were, participate in “a community of practice, a community that acts as a living curriculum” for them (Van Velzen & Volman, 2009, p. 347). Moreover, cross-cultural learning works two ways: One gains insight into the new culture, and this often leads to renewed insight into one’s own culture.

Love in the classroom. Hooks (2000) points out that teaching and learning in general are acts of love, in which both teachers and students are equal partners. If there is love in the classroom, all involved will be inclined to open their minds and hearts. In this way, strong learning communities can be formed. Similarly, Smith and Carvill (2000) emphasize that studying a second language can also be seen as an act of love. By studying the language of the host culture in which students will be staying for a semester, they communicate to their hosts that they would like to meet them at their level and to find out what it means to live in a culture like that. Through their act of love, they acknowledge that they are eager to engage their hosts (Smith & Carvill, 2000).

Review of Methodological Issues

When it comes to conducting studies in an educational framework, researchers have several methodologies at their disposal: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. These methods differ from each other in a number of respects: purpose, focus of interest, nature of the research question, data collection, data analysis, and form of presentation.

In general, the purpose of quantitative research is to describe and analyze relationships between variables, with groups as the focus of study, so that theory can be

tested (Lodico et al., 2010). Data are collected through surveys, observations, interviews, documents, and records and can be represented by numbers, such as frequencies, percentages, and measurements. The results are presented through conventional reporting of sample data and results of statistical tests leading to inferences about underlying characteristics of the defined population (Creswell, 2009). Two examples of quantitative studies in the field of education are Pastore and Carr-Chellman (2009) and Green, Bretzin, Leininger, and Stauffer (2001), both of which were based on interviews with and observations of students regarding their motivation and concerns.

The purpose of qualitative research, on the other hand, is to give a rich description and interpretation of meaning, with as its twofold foci of interest the individual(s) and theory development (Lodico et al., 2010). In most cases, the researcher takes an active part in the study. Data are collected from sources, such as persons, documents, or artifacts, that can be described in words, phrases, and themes. They are analyzed through the interpretation of words into themes and categories from which meaning can be derived (Creswell, 2009). The research findings are presented in the form of a chronicle of interaction with information sources and telling of the story of how meaning emerged (Creswell, 2009). Two examples of qualitative studies in the field of education are Little (2008), which looked at the role of certain learning development associates at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom; and Zepke and Leach (2007), which investigated what instructors thought about teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds at colleges and universities in New Zealand.

The third research methodology, the mixed methods approach, combines the two methodologies mentioned earlier. Since research methodology itself keeps on developing

and evolving, and many research problems show an increasing complexity, the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods can be utilized in this combination (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, more and more research is done in an interdisciplinary way, so that there is an increasing need for methodologies that would be suitable to be applied in those situations. Two examples of studies in the field of education that use a mixed methods approach are Li and Wong (2008), which studied the implementation of a set of newly developed indicators of early learning and teaching, based on western ideologies, by the Chinese government in Hong Kong; and Hancock (2006), which discusses the impact of studies of second language learning conducted during the past few decades in the United States and which promotes a new, international focus on research projects for the future.

Considering those three research methodologies that are available to the researcher, a basic qualitative research method seemed the best fit for a study that would describe the self-reported perspectives of award-winning second language teachers on their qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. In other words, the research question prompted the method. This basic qualitative study was of an exploratory nature and was designed and implemented in accordance with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015). The focus was on describing and understanding what makes those exceptional teachers exceptional. The data were obtained through interviews. According to Patton (2015), researchers interview people to find out from them those things that cannot be directly observed, such as their thoughts, past behaviors and situations, and their philosophies. “The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 426).

Synthesis of Research Findings

In synthesizing the themes that have emerged from the literature review, both on a topical and on a methodological level, one can see certain patterns emerging. The four elements of the literature review, namely philosophies of instruction, theories of learning, qualities of excellence, and best practices will be put together, thereby implying that instruction and learning cannot really be separated from teaching excellence and best practices. All four are connected, as has become clear from the criteria for potential nominations for an award of excellence that universities and professional organizations list on their websites. Teaching and learning a second language is an endeavor that combines a number of separate ingredients into one coherent, holistic framework. It is for that reason that research studies in the field of education make a contribution to both theory and practice (Gay, 1996).

Both instruction and learning are closely connected in today's educational literature, which justifies a joint synthesis of these aspects of the study. The various philosophies of instruction, discussed in the previous sections, assign different roles to the instructors and the students. Hase and Kenyon (2007) were inspired by Knowles's theory of andragogy when they were philosophizing about modern ways of teaching and learning, and according to the authors, "andragogy did not go far enough" (p. 112). This idea was further developed by Canning (2010) and Blaschke (2012). Canning, a lecturer at the Open University in the United Kingdom, studied the relationship between her learners, how they engaged with each other, and how learning and teaching strategies could be used to empower self-directed learning. With the inclusion of the heutagogical theory of learning, she engaged her students in a process of reflective practice about their

progress to self-directedness, to taking full control of their own learning, whereby learner maturity and autonomy was inversely proportional to instructor control and course structuring. One of the important roles the instructor played in this process was to help students progress from the lowest Level 1 (pedagogy: engagement), via Level 2 (andragogy: cultivation), to the top Level 3 (heutagogy: realization) (Blaschke, 2012; Canning, 2010).

According to Ashton and Newman (2006), “heutagogy prepares students for the self-determined lifelong learning which is essential for survival in a 21st century world” (p. 825). The authors, both of whom lectured in early childhood education at the University of Western Sydney in Australia, combined Brookfield’s theory of lifelong learning (Brookfield, 1986) with Hase and Kenyon’s concept of heutagogy (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). The authors strongly believe that heutagogy places the learner at the center of the learning process, with the potential of engaging both learners and instructors in deep partnerships within communities of learning and practice.

Concerning teaching excellence and best practices, there are many excellent teachers who may all use different ways of teaching. The studies by Elton (1996), Gibbs (1996), and Gregory (1996), along with the published criteria for the nominations for excellent teacher awards by professional organizations and individual universities nationwide, have provided criteria and best practice models for teaching excellence in general. According to Brown and Cumpler (2013), there is no consensus among practitioners as to what the most effective teaching method is in the field of second language education. It is assumed that the perspectives held by exceptional second language teachers may help shed light on this matter.

In terms of the research design that was chosen, the study into those perspectives was conducted with the help of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. In this way, the 16 participants themselves could truly determine what dimensions and words to use in order to describe the matters asked for, without feeling restricted to think along predetermined lines. Open-ended questions allowed the participant “to select from that person’s full repertoire of possible responses those that are most *salient*” (Patton, 2015, p. 447; italics in original).

Critique of Previous Research

The theories of instruction and learning discussed earlier in this chapter do not only have supporters. There are also researchers and practitioners who have questions about certain aspects of those theories and express doubts about the applicability of them in certain contexts.

Malcom Knowles received criticism on his theory of andragogy. Some wondered if what he proposed was a theory in the first place, and if adult learning was so fundamentally different from child learning. Others questioned the validity of his assumption that adults have more experience to bring into the classroom than children (Merriam et al., 2007). Bright and Mahdi (2010) criticized Knowles for having ignored the cultural, sociohistorical, and immigrant contexts of many learners. In later publications, Knowles (1989) changed his position on the exclusiveness of andragogy for adult learners, claiming that pedagogy and andragogy are not each other’s opposites but rather function as a continuum, “ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning[;] and that both approaches are appropriate with children and adults, depending on the situation” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 87).

Concerning the applicability of the theory of heutagogy, the question may be justified as to whether this theory can be applied effectively in every educational environment, regardless of its specific nature. McAuliffe, Hargreaves, Winter, and Chadwick (2008) are of the opinion that although certain principles of self-determined learning could be implemented in their courses at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, it was however not possible to fully implement the theory of heutagogy. They attribute this to requirements regarding course content and student learning assessment imposed on them by accrediting vocational institutions. This prevents their students from having control over what is assessed and what is not. If these students do not meet the criteria laid down by those institutions, they do not meet the requirements for their profession and professional practice, either. Therefore, McAuliffe and colleagues are forced to revert back to andragogical and even pedagogical approaches in their courses, although they are fully aware that the styles of teaching and learning currently used are not really effective for their students.

The challenge of students having control over their own assessments is also recognized by Ashton and Newman (2006) in their teacher education courses. In their efforts to offer flexible and blended courses based on heutagogical principles, the authors were satisfied about the students being at the center of the learning process, the collaborative community that had established itself during the semester, and the construction of knowledge through learning. However, they also found that the sheer number of students enrolled in those classes was a hindrance to them planning their own assessments. They hope to continue exploring avenues to eventually include student

assessment planning in their learning environment, which they at this point still see as an “unfinished symphony” (Ashton & Newman, 2006, p. 835).

In terms of theories of learning and best practices of second language teaching, there is some controversy about the Total Physical Response (TPR) method developed by Asher (1993). Majid Al-Humaidi voiced some criticism on Asher’s TPR method in a Middle Eastern context (Al-Humaidi, n.d.). Some of the valid points he mentioned are (a) students who are not used to this type of behavior in class feel very embarrassed when asked to do this—it actually adds a lot of stress on the students, rather than removing it, as was Asher’s objective; (b) it primarily works at the beginning level, with a non-abstract vocabulary; (c) the students are mainly listening, not producing themselves; (d) the vocabulary that is used in class is not based on high frequency lists, but rather on the ease with which it can be applied to TPR situations; and (e) the method is time-consuming—like native language acquisition with little children, it takes a lot of time to master structures—and demands extremely innovative and creative teachers. In later publications, Asher (2009) admitted that besides TPR, other methods and techniques should be used in second language learning as well.

The awards of excellence given to teachers at institutions of postsecondary education appear to be unevenly distributed among the departments. For instance, at the University of Utah, it is quite unusual for second language teachers to receive an award of excellence, since among the 62 award recipients during the last 15 years only two were connected to the Department of Languages and Literatures (University of Utah, n.d.). At the University College Dublin, Ireland, during the past 10 years, only one second language teacher received an award, out of the 27 recipients from other departments

(University College Dublin, n.d.). During the past 15 years, the Online Learning Consortium (2016) did not present an excellence of teaching award to any second language teacher, which could mean that innovative technological advances have not really found a firm footing within online second language instruction. And, finally, although teachers from both high schools and postsecondary institutions have been nominated for the ACTFL National Teacher of the Year Award during the past 10 years, only high school teachers were actually elected to be the recipients of this award.

The criteria of teaching excellence published by Gibbs (1996), Gregory (1996), and Elton (1996) focused on postsecondary instructors from across the disciplines, but not specifically on those from modern language departments. With the new insights gained from interviews with award-winning second language college and university teachers, colleagues all over the country may be encouraged to improve their teaching and learning practices so that they too may be recognized as educators of excellence.

Summary

The literature reviewed shows interesting connections between philosophies of teaching and theories of learning on the one hand, and excellence of teaching and best practices on the other. In fact, all four elements are connected and they influence each other in many ways. Exceptional teachers use best practices in their classes that correlate with their theories of learning and instruction. Several studies looked at criteria of excellence for teachers in postsecondary institutions of education, some of which can be applied to second language learning as well. Professional second language organizations have also posted criteria of excellence on their websites, with which nominees for awards

are evaluated. What had not been studied, however, was what award-winning second language teachers see as their strengths in terms of theoretical concepts and best practices. This basic qualitative study wanted to fill this gap and through semi-structured interviews explored the perspectives held by exceptional second language teachers.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the methodology of the study. After listing the purpose of the study and the research questions, it will continue to describe the research design chosen for a study of this nature. It will identify what the target population was and how potential candidates from this population were purposefully recruited. Data were collected through interviews, and the interview protocols will be addressed as well. The collected data were organized and analyzed through coding. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the credibility and transferability of the study and to what extent ethical issues have been taken into consideration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. Discovering these perspectives has provided valuable insights into the ways languages are taught and learned at institutions of postsecondary education, which may enable educators to establish benchmarks that push second language learning and instruction to a higher level in the future.

Research Questions

Central Research Question. What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional second language teachers in the twenty-first century?

Sub-question 1. What qualities do exceptional second language teachers think they possess that have helped them to excel as second language teachers?

Sub-question 2. What practices do exceptional second language teachers use that they think contribute to their effectiveness?

Sub-question 3. What are the philosophies of teaching used by exceptional second language teachers?

Sub-question 4. What theories of language learning do exceptional second language teachers use?

Research Design

This basic qualitative study was designed and implemented in accordance with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015). The focus was on describing and understanding what makes excellent second language teachers excellent. If “the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved,” a basic qualitative study would be the best approach (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). In order to address the research problem, data were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews with award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education. Existing literature on the evaluation of teachers was used for the formulation of interview questions.

According to Merriam (2009), “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). Since the interviewees lived and worked in different states, it was not doable for the purpose of this study to observe them in their actual teaching environment. The interviews lasted

about 45 minutes each and were audio recorded with permission and fully transcribed. According to Merriam (2009), “verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis” (p. 110). Patton (2015) complemented this by saying, “during the interviewing process itself—that is, during the data collection phase—the purpose of each interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective. Some method for recording the verbatim responses of people being interviewed is therefore essential” (pp. 471-472). If that had been a problem to the interviewees, notes would have been taken in a thorough and comprehensive fashion, especially since it was important to gather actual quotations (Patton, 2015).

The interviews were semi-structured and guided by four structured interview questions, used flexibly, without a specific chronological order (Merriam, 2009). The goal was to receive specific information from the participants that is closely related to the research topic.

In accordance with Patton’s (2015) guidelines, this researcher asked informed consent in advance of the interview, via email, thereby communicating messages about the importance of the information, the reasons for that importance, and “the willingness of the interviewer to explain the purpose of the interview out of respect for the interviewee” (p. 498). At the beginning of the interview, participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any given question and that they might end the interview at any time. Participants had a chance to review the transcript of their interview before the data were analyzed so as to allow for corrections.

The analysis of the data involved looking for recurring patterns that characterize the data. Codes emerged that together formed the basis of an understanding of how the

teachers interpreted their experiences and theories. According to Merriam (2009), the findings of a basic qualitative study like this “*are* these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived” (p. 23; italics in original). Considering the nature of the research problem and the research questions formulated to address the problem, a basic qualitative study seemed the best fit.

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures

In this section, the target population from which the sample was drawn will be identified. The sampling method will be discussed, along with other procedures related to the study, such as the sample size, the setting of the study, and the way in which participants were recruited.

Target Population

This researcher wanted to describe, understand, and gain insight into the perspectives of second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education who had proven to be exceptional in their field and who had been recognized by their peers or professional organizations for their excellence. The target population, therefore, was teachers who met those requirements.

Sampling Method

In line with the principles of a basic qualitative study, which is not about obtaining a large sample nor about generalizing results on the basis of statistical, quantitative data, nonprobability sampling was the method chosen to select potential participants. The most common form of nonprobability sampling is purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). The goal of this type of sampling is to recruit people who

can provide “the richest and most detailed information to help us answer our research questions” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 134). According to Curtis, Gesler, Smith, and Washburn (2000), samples in qualitative studies are usually small, “are studied intensively, and each one typically generates a large amount of information” (p. 1002).

The sample for this study consisted of award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education because the researcher wanted to describe, understand, and gain insight into the perspectives of those teachers. For that reason, the sampling method can also be called “homogeneous sampling”, a sub-category of purposeful sampling, since “all participants share[d] similar characteristics” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 134), namely those described above.

With this in mind, second language teachers from various colleges and universities nationwide were recruited who had received an award of excellence from a professional national or regional organization or from the institution they were serving. There are several national organizations of second language teachers that extend awards of excellence to one or more of their members on an annual basis: World Language Association (WLA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Foreign Language Association (FLA), Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL), and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Per state, one of these organizations has a state division center through which they operate. For example, in Alabama this division is called the Alabama Association of Foreign Language Teachers, in Georgia the Foreign Language Association of Georgia, in Michigan the Michigan World Language Association, and in Pennsylvania the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association. In addition, there are regional divisions, such as Central

States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSCTFL), South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAML), and Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT), that extend a similar type of award of excellence (Foreign Language Associations, n.d.).

All these divisions have published their award criteria on their websites as well as a link to a list of previous recipients. Some divisions only award second language teachers working at high schools, whereas others have separate awards for high school teachers and postsecondary teachers. The associations usually publish the names of the schools where the award winners were employed as well. The email addresses of eligible recipients could be found on the schools' public websites.

Sample Size

Sixteen award-winning second language teachers were interviewed in this basic qualitative study. According to Guest et al. (2006) and Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), a minimum of 12 participants is needed to meet the saturation criteria for a qualitative research study in which the interview method is used. Guest et al. (2006) mentioned that in their study "data saturation had for the most part occurred by the time [they] had analyzed twelve interviews" (p. 74) and assumed that "the more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner [one] would expect to reach saturation" (p. 76).

Setting

All interviews were conducted from the researcher's work office at the college. Some interviewees expressed a preference to be called at home, while others made no mention of where they would be when their phone or Skype call came through. This

researcher was always by himself when conducting the interviews and he got the impression that the interviewees were by themselves as well during that time.

Recruitment

This researcher went through all the available online lists of second language teachers who had been recipients of an award of excellence and initially selected a group of 12 who would be eligible to participate in the study. The number of men and women was evenly distributed among this group and most of them were living in different parts of the country. They received an email message with information about the study and an invitation to participate. If they wanted more detailed information, a follow-up email message answering their questions would be sent. They were politely requested to respond to the invitation within a week and would receive a \$25 stipend in the form of a gift credit card or a check if they decided to participate. Three teachers responded by the deadline: Two of them respectfully declined the invitation and one asked for more information. After a week, those who had not responded by that time received a brief email reminder. In addition, 58 more invitations were sent out to other potential participants.

The 70 award winners who were invited work all across the United States and in some European countries, and represented the following language programs, in alphabetical order: Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, English as a Second Language, French, German, Greek, Hawaiian, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Portuguese, Russian, Slavic, Spanish, and Turkish. Out of those 70, 16 were willing and able to participate in the study. They received the informed consent form, which they returned signed before their interview was held.

In order to find out if he would need site permission to conduct phone interviews with potential participants, this researcher consulted Capella University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). He was informed that for this study he would not need site permission unless the participants requested it.

Data Collection

The only way in which data were collected for this study was through interviews with award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education. All interviews were conducted from the researcher's work office at the college. During the interviews, Creswell's (2009) guidelines for an interview protocol were adhered to (p. 183).

As soon as the phone or Skype connection had been made, the researcher greeted the interviewee and introduced himself. He briefly explained the reasons behind the interview and reminded the interviewee of the two elements on the informed consent form that they had signed off earlier: They had been given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research project before the interview was scheduled and they did not mind being audio recorded. After that had been reconfirmed, the interviewees were also informed about the possibility of terminating the interview whenever they felt they had to. It turned out that none of them took advantage of that opportunity.

The underlying theme of the interviews was encapsulated in the research sub-questions, on the basis of which guiding interview questions had been formulated. Before these were addressed, the researcher used an ice-breaker question in which the interviewees were invited to describe their school, the culture of the school, and the

students attending their second language classes. This was followed by four questions which were based on the research sub-questions. They were asked in an open-ended way so that the informants could respond in their own words. These questions had been sent to the interviewees one or two days prior to the interview.

1. What are, in your opinion, the qualities needed to excel as a second language teacher at this institution / in the twenty-first century / in this country?

(Related to Research sub-question 1.)

2. What practices do you use that are conducive to student learning and to teaching excellence? (Related to Research sub-question 2.)

3. What are the philosophies of teaching that you support / adhere to in your instruction? (Related to Research sub-question 3.)

4. What theories of language learning do you support / adhere to / believe in? (Related to Research sub-question 4.)

According to Patton (2015), it is with open-ended questions that the interviewees truly determine what dimensions and words they use among themselves to describe the matters asked for, without feeling restricted to think along predetermined lines. “The truly open-ended question allows the person being interviewed to select from among that person’s full repertoire of possible responses those that are most *salient*” (p. 447; italics in original).

The answers to the four guiding interview questions gave enough information to follow those up with more specific questions about the aspects of teaching mentioned by the participants, such as student motivation, learning styles, and the use of technology in the classroom. When the interview was drawing to a close, the interviewer reminded the

interviewees of the purpose of the interview and asked them if there were any aspects of excellent teaching and learning that had been left untouched. In almost all of the cases, the interviewees came up with some additional information.

Following Lodico et al.'s (2010) advice about the interviewing process, this researcher tried to be natural in his behavior. "In a good qualitative interview, the interviewer talks freely in a naturalistic way" (p. 125), and "your interview questions should sound like questions from a natural conversation" (p. 127). Furthermore, the researcher listened attentively and respected the interviewee's responses, used verbal and nonverbal ways (such as nodding) to indicate interest, and asked follow-up questions (pp. 128-129).

Patton (2015) advises to record details about the way in which the interview went, such as how the interviewees reacted to the questions and if there were special conditions under which the interviews were conducted. The researcher took notes during the interviews, listing the key words that were mentioned by the interviewees in response to the interview questions so that follow-up questions could be asked. The researcher also wrote down anything that struck him as unusual, such as an instance in which a participant had to leave her seat and answer the doorbell because her dogs had started barking, or another instance in which a dog that was supposedly asleep behind the participant lifted its head as soon as it heard my voice coming through the interviewee's computer. The interviewees were told they would get the opportunity to review their transcribed interview for accuracy before the data would be analyzed.

The Skype interviews were audio recorded with MP3 Skype Recorder, a software program that starts recording a Skype conversation as soon as it begins, provided that it

has been activated. The telephone interviews were recorded with Audacity; in this case the phone would be set on speaker phone mode and the recording laptop put right next to the phone. Both programs had been installed on the researcher's password protected laptop. All audio recordings of the interviews were saved as MP3 files on the same laptop. As a backup, just in case there would be an issue with the software, all interviews were also recorded on a cassette tape with an old-style cassette recorder. The tapes were reused for the next interview as soon as it became clear that the audio recording on the laptop was of good quality. Instant review of the recording helped the researcher make sure that whatever had been said made sense.

In order to prepare the research data for analysis, the interviews were both recorded and transcribed (Creswell, 2009). After the audio recordings had been saved, they were uploaded to VoiceBase, an online program that provides a free machine transcription of an audio file. As soon as the transcription was finished, usually within two hours, an email would be sent out to the uploader and the text would be available for download. These were the rough drafts which the researcher used for his own interview transcription. Listening to the recorded interviews and revising the draft transcriptions was time-consuming, but it was the best way to get accurate verbatim transcriptions. This included a representation of the exact words of the participants, as well as some aspects of nonverbal communication, "such as pauses, laughter, interruptions, changes in vocal tone or emotion, and places where the recording [was] inaudible or not understandable" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 181).

Test Runs

The study benefitted from a few test runs. The researcher conducted brief mock interviews with two fellow second language teachers over the phone in order to practice how to begin an interview and how to ask follow-up questions based on the responses to each interview question. These teachers were not eligible to be part of the real research process, since neither of them had received an award of excellence, and they did not receive an informed consent form to sign, either.

The technology that would be used for recording the interviews was tested, as well. One family member was asked to answer a Skype call, during which the researcher practiced with the MP3 Skype Recorder software, and another one was asked to answer a telephone call, during which the researcher practiced recording with Audacity software. Also, the backup plan to record every conversation with a cassette recorder was practiced during one of those exercises.

Data Analysis Procedures

The MP3 recordings of the Skype and telephone interviews were submitted to a free online machine transcription service called VoiceBase, which produced a rough transcript of each interview. In addition, the researcher requested a human transcription of the same interviews from this service, after he had received a confirmation in writing that participant confidentiality would be maintained. Following approved practice, the researcher transcribed the first five interviews himself, as well—Merriam (2009) recommends that “new and experienced researchers transcribe at least the first few interviews of any study, if at all possible” (p. 110). Every transcribed version was

compared to its audio recorded counterpart multiple times until the researcher knew he had the best possible transcript. The final transcript of each interview was emailed to the participant concerned for verification purposes, and the majority of the interviewees responded back with comments about that version. In the case of inaudible sections on the recording, plausible solutions were put forward by the participants. This happened a few times.

All transcripts were studied and coded. According to Creswell (2009), it is important to first get a general sense of the information obtained and to reflect on its meaning in general, with the help of questions such as “What general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of the ideas? What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information?” (p. 185). These bits of information were compared with other data, thereby looking for similar segments in the different interviews. In this way, initial categories were constructed and named in the margin of the printed transcripts by the researcher. This method is an inductive way of categorizing: “You begin with detailed bits or segments of data, cluster data units together that seem to go together, then ‘name’ the cluster” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183). The categories that emerged met a number of important criteria for data analysis in this type of qualitative study, including answering the research questions and being exhaustive in the sense that they covered all important data (Merriam, 2009).

“Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research,” Merriam (2009, p. 165) stipulates, and Creswell (2009) concurs with this in the sense that “qualitative analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data” (p. 184). After the first interview had been conducted, the researcher refined and reformulated the questions.

“It is an interactive process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 165).

Coding is the process of organizing the available data into segments of text before bringing meaning to the information. This involved segmenting phrases and sentences into categories and labeling those categories with a term, “often a term based in the actual language of the participant” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Although coding could be done on topics that one could expect to find (predetermined codes), this researcher chose to “develop codes *only* on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 187; italics in original), that is to say, he would wait for codes to emerge from the data (emerging codes). Therefore, he did not use any terms or phrases during the interviews that he had learned from his literature review on second language teaching and learning in order to guide, or limit in a sense, the interviewees’ thoughts, but waited for the interviewees to use those kinds of references and then ask follow-up questions about them. This meant that a question about the use of technology in the classroom could only be asked after the interviewees had used the reference to technology themselves.

As has been alluded to before, this researcher first hand coded the interview transcripts, using color code schemes, and wrote those categories in the margin of the transcripts. At this stage of the analysis, it was essential to look for “recurring regularities” in the data that had been collected (Patton, 2015, p. 555). This also included comments the researcher had written in the margin of his interview note pages, called “memos,” such as some preliminary analysis and interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 136). Next, text passages were cut and pasted on electronic note cards

(Creswell, 2009, p. 188). This first method of coding is called “open coding” since the researcher is open to any sort of categorization at that point (Merriam, 2009, p. 178).

After having gone through an interview transcript, the researcher grouped those open codes based on their appearing similarity. This stage of coding is called “axial coding or analytical coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). These processes of open coding and axial coding were done for every interview transcript. The codes that emerged were put together on one joint list of concepts.

The last step in analyzing the data was putting the patterns or regularities that had emerged into categories or themes (Merriam, 2009, pp. 180-181). Since data segments might be viewed or coded differently by different researchers, this researcher “continually read, reread, and reexamine[d] all of [his] data to make sure that [he had] not missed something or coded it in a way that is inappropriate to the experiences of the participants” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 184). In addition, NVivo 11 software was used to help code, organize, and sort information—a process which is also supported by methodological literature (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Limitations of the Research Design

The research was based on Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015) in terms of their guidelines for a semi-structured qualitative interview design. Sixteen participants, who had been purposefully sampled, were willing to take part in the interviews and answer questions on the ways in which they had conducted their classes in second language education at colleges and universities. The number of 16 participants met the minimum

requirement of 12 to meet the saturation criteria established for research through interviews (Guest et al., 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Only award-winning teachers were invited, which meant that any excellent teachers who just did not happen to have won an award were excluded. The interview structure of the study limited the ways in which information was gathered and analyzed. Because of matters concerning distance and finances, the interviews were conducted via Skype or over the phone; there were no on-site class observations. Yet, using this kind of research structure is legitimate and is supported by methodological literature (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). The researcher realized that the data analysis could only be as good as the data collected, that is, dependent on the information given by the participants.

And to the researcher who is afraid of finding nothing substantial that could lead to answering his research questions, Patton (2015) offers some words of encouragement. The author claims that “the thoughts and reflections from those people at that time and in that place are there, recorded and reported. That is much more than ‘nothing.’” (Patton, 2015, p. 556).

Credibility

According to Patton (2015), credibility can be enhanced by keeping the analysis closely connected to the research purpose and design, by searching for and analyzing exceptions to the identified patterns, by keeping the qualitative analysis qualitative (only using numbers when appropriate and when it enhances understanding), and by playing the devil’s advocate (if necessary with the help of another analyst) in order to “surface doubts and weaknesses as well as build on strengths and confirm solid solutions” (p.

660). Merriam (2009) discusses several strategies to enhance credibility, including member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, reflexivity, and peer review.

In a study whose findings may provide new insights into the phenomenon itself and present new knowledge to the field, these insights and that knowledge must be credible and trustworthy. This researcher conducted the interviews in an ethical way and the study participants gave credible information about their theories of learning and instruction as well as about their practices. The second language teachers who agreed to be interviewed, enjoyed sharing their expertise and experience with the researcher. The interviews were rich with information, and many different codes emerged out of the data. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants for verification purposes, which enabled them to make corrections, if necessary.

This researcher received sufficient preparation through his doctoral programs at Leiden University, the Netherlands, as well as Capella University so that he was well-equipped to design, conduct, and analyze the study. In addition, the researcher has been active in second language teaching for about 30 years at both the high school and the college level, has observed colleagues teach and present at conferences on a regular basis, and has read widely on the topic of second language instruction.

Dependability

Dependability, or “reliability”, as it is called in Merriam (2009, p. 210), is also an important aspect of credibility. Dependability was enhanced by the researcher describing in detail how the study was designed and conducted. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed and categories constructed and named in an inductive way. As

has been mentioned earlier, the researcher used the strategies of reflexivity and peer review in order to identify and adjust for biases in his interpretation of the findings. The researcher's assumptions and potential biases were identified and explained, as well as the limitations of the study, and both colleagues and the full dissertation committee were asked to examine the findings in light of the collected data. All of this takes into account the assumption that "qualitative researchers can never capture an objective 'truth' or 'reality'" (Merriam, 2009, p. 215).

Transferability

Transferability, which refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized or transferred to other situations, has always been the object of much debate in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009, p. 234). Qualitative studies in general describe specific situations and events and often do not lend themselves to generalizations of the type that is common in quantitative studies. If the findings of a qualitative study have the potential of being transferable, Patton (2015) explains that this might go "from particular cases to others based on similarity of context and conditions" (p. 719).

In the case of this study, its credibility might have transferability to other exceptional second language teachers who were not interviewed. In addition, since the expert teachers in the study were purposefully selected, the findings might be extrapolated to "principles of practice" or "lessons learned" that could be adapted in certain settings in which those principles can be applied (Patton, 2015, p. 714), that is, the work settings of non-award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is not so much the

researcher who has to prove that his findings are transferable, but rather “the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298).

Expected Findings

The purpose of the study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives held by exceptional second language teachers regarding their own qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. Since the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed showed multifaceted approaches to second language instruction and learning, the researcher expected the interviewees’ perspectives to reflect this many-sidedness of the profession.

According to Merriam (2009), researchers should “articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study at hand” (p. 219). This strategy is called “reflexivity.” This researcher has been a second language teacher for about 30 years and has worked in two different countries, so he is informed about the various ways in which languages can be taught, learned, and acquired. It is to be expected that in the future technology will continue to play a bigger role in education in general and in second language education in particular, and that this would be reflected in the interviewees’ perspectives on teaching and learning.

A basic qualitative study like the present one is the most common mode of qualitative research that is used in the field of education. The data showed recurring patterns characteristic of those data, and it was exactly those “recurring patterns of themes supported by the data from which they were derived” that constituted the findings

(Merriam, 2009, p. 23). It is expected that the field of second language teaching and learning at institutions of postsecondary education will benefit from those findings.

Ethical Issues

In any study involving human participants, it is important to address the positions of both the researcher and the participants in the process, as well as other ethical issues. The researcher discussed potential conflicts in this study with his dissertation mentor and the other members of the dissertation committee. Capella University's IRB approved the study.

Researcher's Position Statement

Conflict of interest assessment. The researcher was able to design, conduct, and analyze the study in a careful way so as to minimize the presence of any academic, financial, or personal interests. Interviewees were recruited from colleges and universities nationwide with which the researcher did not have an affiliation; research was not conducted in the researcher's own workplace and he did not have a personal relationship with any of the interviewees. The researcher was not paid by any party to conduct the study, nor would he benefit from the study financially. Independent reviewers from Capella University's IRB as well as the dissertation mentor approved the informed consent form sent out to the participants, which evidenced limitation of a possible conflict of personal interest on the part of the researcher.

Researcher's position. The researcher has been a second language teacher for about 30 years at both the high school and the college level and has read widely on the topic of second language instruction. Considering this, the research topic had been on the

mind of the researcher for many years. The participants who were recruited had no relationship to the researcher except that they were fellow teachers at other colleges and universities. No participants were recruited from the researcher's own college or from other colleges and universities where he had worked in the past. During the entire study, the researcher was honest to his participants and protected them from harm or discomfort in all possible ways. As has been indicated in the previous paragraph, the researcher was able to minimize any potential conflicts of interest. Personal bias concerning the research topic was avoided through the use of reflexivity and peer examination.

Ethical Issues in the Study

In accordance with Capella University's guidelines on issues of an ethical nature, the researcher made sure that the participants were protected from harm. This aspect was also addressed in the informed consent form that all participants signed before the interviews were scheduled. The atmosphere during the interviews was quite relaxed, yet professional, and there were no stressful moments for anyone involved. The data collected were not sensitive in any sort of way. The participants took part in the interviews voluntarily and were informed that they could conclude the interview at any moment, if they so desired. No interview was stopped prematurely. Nine of the first 12 second language teachers that had been invited to participate were sent a reminder after a week because only three had responded. After the other 58 email invitations had been sent to potential participants, no more reminders were necessary. All but two interviewees received a \$25 gift card or a check as a stipend for their participation; the two declared they did not need a gratuity.

No existing instruments were used during the study for which permission was needed. As has been referred to earlier, Capella University's IRB informed the researcher that he did not need site permission for this study, unless a participant would request that he did; no such request came.

This researcher did not and will not use the recordings and transcripts of the interviews for any other purpose than the specified research purpose. During the interviews, the researcher only referred to personal information that is available on the Internet, such as place of work or the participant's position within the department. Any information revealed by the participants themselves during the interviews, such as age, ethnicity, or other personal information, has been kept confidential. The written transcripts of the interviews were numbered and only this researcher has the list of people corresponding to the numbers. In this study, the interviewees were referred to as Participant A, Participant B, and so forth, so that no one would be able to identify the participants.

The researcher removed the recordings and transcripts of the interviews from his laptop and saved them on a USB stick, which was then put into a secured filing cabinet in the researcher's office, thus protecting participant confidentiality. In accordance with Capella University's research policy, only the researcher, his faculty mentor, the dissertation committee, or the IRB may review the research records, if they so desire. The collected data will be kept secured in the locked filing cabinet for seven years and then destroyed.

Summary

To a researcher who wanted to learn about the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education regarding their own qualities, practices, philosophies of instruction, and theories of learning, it was important to identify, describe, and understand those perspectives in an academic way. Discovering these perspectives may provide valuable insights into the ways languages are taught and learned today, which may in turn enable current and future educators to establish benchmarks that push second language learning to a new level.

An effective way for these teachers to share their perspectives was via a personal interview in which they informed the researcher about their theories and practices. A methodological design following Merriam's (2009) and Patton's (2015) guidelines on semi-structured interviews was beneficial in helping answer the main research question referred to above, the research sub-questions, and any additional questions that arose on the basis of the interviewees' responses. The overall purpose of a basic qualitative study is "to *understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23; italics in original), and that is why an exploratory study like this was the best fit to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives exceptional second language teachers have regarding their qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, the study was designed along a semi-structured interview method and implemented in accordance with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015).

The four structured questions used in the interviews were:

Interview Question 1. What are, in your opinion, the qualities needed to excel as a second language teacher in the twenty-first century? (Related to Research question 1a, see Chapter 1, p. 6.)

Interview Question 2. What practices do you use that are conducive to student learning and to teaching excellence? (Related to Research question 1b.)

Interview Question 3. What philosophies of teaching do you adhere to in your instruction? (Related to Research question 1c.)

Interview Question 4. What theories of language learning do you believe in? (Related to Research question 1d.)

The research methodology and data collection procedures discussed in Chapter 3 were implemented, and Chapter 4 will provide detailed information about how the data were analyzed and conclude with a presentation of the findings.

This current chapter will present a rich description of the sample size and the professional profiles of the participants, thereby keeping in mind their right to privacy.

The analysis of the data involved looking for recurring patterns and is represented in the form of a narrative. Codes were assigned, based on recurring patterns, which formed the basis of an understanding of how the award-winners responded to the interview questions. The findings of the study “*are* these recurring patterns or themes” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23; italics in original). The themes that emerged from the interview data are presented in relation to one of the four research sub-questions they relate to.

Description of the Sample

This researcher wanted to describe, understand, and gain insight into the perspectives of second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education who had proven to be exceptional in their field and who had been recognized by their peers or professional organizations for their excellence. The target population, therefore, was teachers who met those requirements. In this section, the sample will be described, including the sample size and the sample characteristics.

Sample Size

Through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015), second language teachers who met the criteria listed above were invited by email to participate in the study. At first, 12 invitations were sent out, and because initially only three responses came in, two of which were negative, a second message was emailed to the same group after the two-week deadline had passed. In addition, another 58 award-recipients were approached via email, bringing the total number of people invited to 70.

From those 70 potential participants, 22 responded by the deadline that they were willing to be interviewed. Sixteen out of the 22 returned the informed consent form to

the researcher via email, signed. A total of seven potential participants responded negatively to the invitation. After the 16 had been interviewed and after the deadline had passed, three more teachers responded positively to the invitation. However, since the minimum saturation criterion of 12 for a qualitative study with which interviews are used had already been met with the 16 (Guest et al., 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), there would be no need for three more interviews, so these late respondents received a kind email of thanks. In all, the response rate (both positive and negative) to the invitation was 46 percent: 32 responses to 70 emails.

Sample Characteristics

All 16 participants who were willing to schedule an interview met the inclusion criterion of having been recognized with an award of excellence by a professional regional or national language organization. None of them decided to withdraw during the interview. Out of those 16, 10 were women and six were men. They were all employed with language departments at institutions of higher education spread out over the country: north, east, south, and west. To be more precise, the participants worked and lived in the states of Georgia (two locations), Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico (two locations), North Carolina (three locations), Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Utah. None of the participants were colleagues at the same institution.

A brief professional profile of each participant will be given, demonstrating that, considering their background, each one of them would be able to make a significant contribution to answering the research questions. In order to protect the privacy of the participants and the institutions with which they were associated, the names of these participants have been changed to pseudonyms (Participant A, Participant B, etc.) and the

institutions have been described with the qualification listed on their website (state university, private college, etc.). The order in which the participants have been listed corresponds to the time they were interviewed: Participant A was the first one to be interviewed, followed by Participant B, and so forth.

Participant A (PA). Participant A was a male who earned his PhD in second language acquisition. He was a professor at a large public university and taught pedagogy of French and a few other languages, such as Chinese, to graduate students. His research interests included the use of technology in second language instruction.

Participant B (PB). Participant B was a male who earned his PhD in romance linguistics. He was a professor at a large state university, taught Spanish, worked with undergraduate and graduate students, and published extensively. His research interests included theory and practice in second language acquisition.

Participant C (PC). Participant C was a female who earned her PhD in modern languages. She was a professor at a large state university and taught Spanish to undergraduate students. One of her research interests was Women Studies.

Participant D (PD). Participant D was a female who earned her PhD in romance literature. She was a lecturer at a large public research university in an urban context, taught French, and worked with graduate students. One of her research interests was second language acquisition.

Participant E (PE). Participant E was a female who earned her PhD in romance linguistics. She was a professor at a large public research university in a big city, taught Spanish to both undergraduate and graduate students, and supervised several departments

in a more administrative role. Her research interests included second language acquisition.

Participant F (PF). Participant F was a female who earned her PhD in educational studies. She was a professor at a middle-sized private college for women and taught Spanish to undergraduate students. One of her research interests was modern language pedagogy.

Participant G (PG). Participant G was a male who earned his PhD in classical studies. He was a professor at a large public research university, taught Latin, and worked with undergraduate and graduate students, both in the classroom and online. His research interests included curriculum design.

Participant H (PH). Participant H was a female who earned her PhD in romance languages and literatures. She was a professor at the largest public university in her state and taught Spanish to students at all levels. Her research interests included second language acquisition and linguistics.

Participant I (PI). Participant I was a male who earned his PhD in romance literature. He was a professor at a large state university, taught French to undergraduate students, and supervised faculty in his department. His research interests included contemporary French poetry and pragmatics.

Participant J (PJ). Participant J was a male who earned his MA in translation and interpretation. He was a professor at a small private college in a rural area, taught Spanish, and worked with undergraduate students and professional interpreters. His research interests included the challenge of interpretation in today's world.

Participant K (PK). Participant K was a female who earned her PhD in foreign language methodology. She was a professor at a medium-sized liberal arts university in an urban area and taught methodology to future foreign language teachers, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. One of her research interests was performance-based instruction.

Participant L (PL). Participant L was a male who earned his PhD in East-Asian languages. He was a professor at one of the largest state universities of the country, taught Chinese, and worked with graduate students and high school teachers. His research interests included foreign language pedagogy.

Participant M (PM). Participant M was a female who earned her PhD in romance languages. She was a professor at a large state university and taught Spanish to undergraduate students. One of her research interests was the incorporation of technology in the foreign language classroom.

Participant N (PN). Participant N was a female who earned her MA in romance languages and literatures. She was a lecturer at a large public research university and worked with undergraduate students pursuing a language teaching degree in French or Spanish. One of her research interests was online language teaching and learning.

Participant O (PO). Participant O was a female who earned her PhD in Germanic studies. She was a professor at a large state university and taught German to students of all proficiency levels. Her research interests included foreign language acquisition.

Participant P (PP). Participant P was a female who earned her PhD in romance languages and literatures. She was a lecturer at a midsize private research university and

taught a variety of courses in Italian language, literature, and culture. One of her research interests was curriculum design.

Research Design and Introduction to the Analysis

The research design employed here was a basic qualitative study. This had clear implications for the way in which the interview data were analyzed. A brief introduction to the analysis will be followed by a section in which the findings of the study are discussed.

Research Design

“Basic qualitative studies can be found throughout the disciplines and in applied fields of practice. They are probably the most common form of qualitative research found in education” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). The basic qualitative research presented here was focused on identifying, describing, and gaining insight into the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers on several aspects of excellence in teaching. The data were obtained through semi-structured phone or Skype interviews with those award winners working at institutions of postsecondary education.

All of these interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed so as to enable the researcher to “capture the actual words of the person being interviewed. The raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken by interviewees. Nothing can substitute for these data” (Patton, 2015, p. 471). The interviewees received a copy of their verbatim transcript via email so that they would be able to verify their words for accuracy and suggest corrections, if any, before the data were analyzed. Seventy-five percent of the participants responded to the researcher’s request, some with a brief “looks good,” others

with a more detailed explanation and clarification of what they had intended to say because their words in the original transcript could be open to different interpretations.

Introduction to the Analysis

Since the primary goal of any basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret how people make sense of their worlds (Merriam, 2009), the data obtained through the interviews were analyzed in such a way that the world of teaching excellence in second language education was described, revealed, and interpreted. To Merriam (2009), “data analysis is the process used to *answer your research question(s)*” (p. 176; italics in original). In order to achieve this, all individual interview transcriptions were studied and coded. It turned out that there were more than 250 pages of interview data to analyze. Since this researcher had made the decision not to work with predetermined codes, he looked for codes to emerge from the data. “Any given data segment might be viewed differently by two different researchers or even coded using more than one label by a given researcher” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 184). It was, therefore, important to continually read, reread, and reexamine all data, first within one interview and later between all interviews, and to make constant comparisons between the data segments, so as to make sure that no important information was overlooked or inappropriately coded.

In accordance with Merriam (2009), looking for recurring regularities took place at three levels: through open coding, through axial coding, and through the construction of themes. The open coding phase is characterized by the researcher being open to anything that might emerge from the data. An individual interview transcript was read and reread, and important phrases and sentences that could potentially be relevant for answering the research questions were highlighted in color. Key terms were then written

in the margin of the transcript, which were based on the actual words of the interviewee (Creswell, 2009). Also, the notes taken while the interview was taking place were written in the margin of the transcripts, in the location where they had occurred. Having pondered the highlighted segments and additional comments, this researcher began to construct initial code clusters for these meaningful phrases.

Table 1

Open Coding from Participant J's Interview Transcript: An Example

Key words	Phrases from the interview transcript
Patience	Just be very patient with the students. To be a language teacher you need to be patient.
Open to corrections	And also to be able to defend what you say, but also be willing to be corrected, to continue to learn more. I teach quite a number of the translation and interpreting courses, and therefore I work with a lot of the Hispanic students.
Lifelong learning	There's always new words for me, new varieties, new flavors of Spanish, of how to say things, and each time I keep learning more and more from my students.
Humility	And just be humble enough to allow yourself, as the instructor, to learn from the students also.
Lifelong learning	To learn from your students and just to always learn more. In my case, because I teach primarily upper level courses and then the translation and interpreting courses, it's always a challenge to know how to handle the situation and how to show your students that you continue to learn, that although you've reached a level of mastery, there's is always more to learn about.
Learning Respect Humility	If there is respect in the classroom, then students will gladly teach you something, and you can easily learn from your students because there's respect, because there's humility, and there's been a certain classroom environment established in which people dare to say something, dare to speak out.
Trust	There's a certain trust that's been established. If there's trust and if there's respect and the people are aware of the roles in the classroom, then it works out quite nicely. It's incredible, then it's suddenly a wonderful learning environment in which we're all learning.
Learning	

Table 1 contains an example of open coding based on the interview transcript of Participant J. This Spanish professor taught a number of Spanish translation and interpretation courses, and often had native speakers of Spanish as students in his classes. Regarding the question about the essential characteristics of an excellent second language teacher, he made some important observations. The sentences on the right in Table 1 are exact quotations from the interviewee's approved transcript, while the key words on the left are the notes written in the margin by the researcher.

The axial coding phase is characterized by the researcher trying to find similar code clusters within one interview transcript and to give names to those clusters. Although the interviews were structured around the four interview questions, it happened more than once that a particular interviewee added relevant information about, for instance, teaching excellence towards the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything left unmentioned during the interview which still needed to be addressed. This meant that relevant information pertaining to one specific interview question could be found in different places in the interview transcript.

Again, Participant J will be used as an example because he really opened up at the end of the interview. In addition to the many characteristics he had listed as a response to the initial question as to what makes an excellent second language teacher excellent—and these were more than the phrases displayed in Table 1—at the end of the interview he mentioned a few more, which had not been addressed before, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Additional Open Coding from Participant J's Interview Transcript

Key words	Phrases from the interview transcript
Justice Grace	One thing that I insist on as students learn, that is part of my class, is the justice aspect. The grace also, but I cannot extend grace just to one student. Any opportunity that I give to one student, I need to extend to all the students. Students catch on very quickly if professors have favorite students and if the treatment is not fairly equal. To be very open about it, that if a student requests something special, many times I'll give it, but then I make it available to everybody in the class.
Equality	
Empowering women	Another thing that I should mention is that the vast majority of my students, especially in the translation and interpreting courses, are female, and to get them to realize that they have potential, to really get them to believe in themselves, and to get them to dare to speak up. Many of our students come from very conservative, traditional backgrounds, and to get the female students to believe in themselves and to speak up and to realize that their voice is just as valid as the voice of their male counterparts, that's, at times, a challenge.
Challenge	
Equality	My approach to the classroom is that we're all equal in the sense that we were all created in God's image. Earlier, when I was speaking about equality and roles and respect in classrooms, that's part of it, that we're all created in God's image.
Respect	
Excellence	I don't see myself as such a wonderful, excellent professor. I'm very timid, I'm very shy, I do not like speaking in front of groups, I'm not a public speaker. I'll interpret for people in front of crowds, but I do not like public speaking and I'm nervous in front of a group. And I think that's why, in my classes, I push for that level of understanding and trust and respect so that I myself can also become comfortable with the students.
Trust, Respect	
Humility	I'm very nervous about my teaching, and that's why I try to be prepared. I'm still not sure always what students see in my classes, which, I think, pushes me to trying harder and harder.

The next step was that all quotations to which the same key word had been assigned were put together on a separate list, and codes were clustered. From Tables 1 and 2, for example, the codes *patience*, *humility*, *respect*, *trust*, and *grace* were put

together under the cluster name *virtues*. In this way, the original 20 to 25 open codes were combined to 10 to 12 code clusters per research sub-question.

The other 15 interview transcripts were analyzed in exactly the same way as the first one, with open coding followed by axial coding. The code clusters from the individual interviews were first copied and pasted onto a separate list for each interview. The 16 lists were eventually “merged into one master list of concepts” derived from all sets of data (Merriam, 2009, p. 180).

The construction of themes phase, finally, consisted of the researcher grouping several recurring patterns, the code clusters that had emerged from the data, together into categories or themes (Merriam, 2009). Combining several code clusters in this way “allows the researcher to examine the qualitative subquestions guiding the research” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 185). In this endeavor, the researcher was able to make use of NVivo 11 to a certain extent. This program was a useful tool for filing text passages, but it was the researcher who made decisions about how to do the analysis (Lodico et al., 2010). After all, it was the researcher—and not the computer program—who assigned the codes and who determined which segments of data went with these codes (Merriam, 2009).

The ultimate goal was to reduce the large number of concrete code clusters and to identify a smaller number of more abstract themes that accurately described the data and answered the research questions. An example of a theme that had emerged from analyzing the data and combining the code clusters *virtues* and *equality*, used in Tables 1 and 2, was *loving one’s neighbor*. Between four to six themes were identified per research sub-question.

Summary of the Findings

The basic qualitative research whose findings are presented here was directed at describing, understanding, and gaining insight into the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education on important aspects of their excellence in teaching. The data were obtained through semi-structured Skype or phone interviews. The themes that have emerged from the data will now be discussed and illustrated with the help of quotations from and references to the actual transcripts of all 16 interviews. These themes answer the central research question and its four sub-questions. The central research question was, *What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional second language teachers in the twenty-first century?*

Before the four structured interview questions were addressed, the researcher asked the participants to describe the institution of postsecondary education they were working at, the culture of the school, the size of the department, and the students they had in their classes. These pieces of information were extremely helpful in better understanding the responses from the participants and in gaining insight into the way they served their students best. Some of the qualities of excellence referred to by the interviewees apply to teachers in general, while others apply to second language teachers in particular.

Qualities of Excellence in Second Language Teachers

Research sub-question 1 was, *What qualities do exceptional second language teachers think they possess that have helped them to excel as second language teachers?* Most second language teachers who were interviewed found it easier to mention qualities

of teachers of excellence in general than to list the qualities they possessed themselves which may have contributed to their having been nominated for an award of excellence. Yet, the six themes that emerged from the data relate to both the question in general and the more personal question about individual qualities of excellence: *loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship.*

Loving one's neighbor. During the interview, Participant J mentioned several ways in which he expressed love for his neighbor. Both teacher and students were "equal in the sense that we were all created in God's image" (PJ). Equality was also expressed in the way he extended grace when one student asked for it: "Any opportunity that I give to one student, I need to extend to all the students" (PJ). Other qualities mentioned by Participant J included "be patient," "be willing to be corrected," "be humble", and "trust." Mutual respect was also emphasized by Participant E concerning the teacher-student relationship: "If you show the students respect, they will in turn show each other respect."

Besides Participant J, there were many teachers who referred to the quality of excellence summarized here as "loving one's neighbor." Participant C mentioned that in order to be a good teacher, one had to be a good person who cared about the wellbeing of the students. She regularly took her students to a Latin American country for service learning projects with poor Mayan women. The students, for instance, would teach the women very practical things, such as how to make soap from scratch, so that these women would be able to sell this product on the market. In return, the women would

teach the students about their daily lives, such as about the things they cooked and the stories they liked.

Because many of his students were first generation students, often had a family, and worked besides going to college, Participant I mentioned empathy as a key characteristic of being an excellent teacher: “empathy for the students and for the time constraints that they have in their lives.” Participant M had similar students in her classes, albeit from a different ethnicity, and declared that a teacher would have to accept the students as they are and “not some idealized version of a student that you might like to have.” Seeing what professors teach in a larger context and considering how what professors teach may have larger implications for humanity itself, was an opinion expressed by Participant F, who called attention to “social justice orientation” and mentioned that she would always try to make connections between marginalized groups in Latin America and marginalized groups in the United States.

Participant D worked with Teaching Assistants (TAs) from all different parts of the world, whose educational backgrounds were very different from those of American students. In order for these TAs to work effectively with American students, they needed to get to know them, learn to appreciate them and to acknowledge their culture in a positive way. Participant D summarized the theme with these words, “We do this because we love to do this. There’s a passion here because we love our students.”

Having expertise in the language taught. Having expertise in teaching a second language was addressed at different levels. Participant E emphasized that an excellent teacher should have a firm linguistic background: “I’m pushing for linguistic training, because I just cannot see how you can teach a second language if you don’t know the

theory behind it.” She worked at the second most diverse university in the nation in terms of its student body, and many heritage speakers whose families had come from a variety of Latin American countries were in her classes. It is important for a Spanish teacher, she said, to be able to understand and explain the articulatory phonetic differences between the dialects of Spanish. This was echoed by Participants G, H, K, N, and O, all of whom advocated having a deep content knowledge of the language, “having depth and breadth of the language and the cultures represented by the language” (PK).

Next to having knowledge about the language, teachers should also be practicing the language as much as possible. Participant J compared a Spanish teacher who has studied Spanish and now teaches it to his students but does not practice the language at home or in the community to a music teacher who teaches all sorts of music courses to her students but does not practice music herself. A second language teacher should not only know the grammar rules but also have “ease of speaking, ease of response, and a wide range of vocab” (PJ).

Being well-versed in second language pedagogy. Being an expert in the language taught alone would not suffice, according to many interviewees. In addition, one has to be able to teach the students in a pedagogically sound manner. According to Participant B, good teachers always ask themselves three questions: “What is it I want my students to know? What is it I want my students to be able to do? How do I get them there?” A good teacher understands the learning process students go through. And so, “a person who understands those things then has a better chance of being successful because they’re working *with* students and not against them” (PB; emphasis by speaker). Stopping periodically and reviewing with the students what progress has been made over

a period of time, is something a good teacher does regularly, said Participant B, the recipient of multiple awards of excellence. In his classes, this would often lead to student excitement about what they were achieving. Participants A and C also mentioned that they were good at identifying which teaching methodologies were needed so that all students would be learning.

In the eyes of Participant B, innovation of instruction could boost student motivation and would lead to more student success. Participant G also promoted “innovative curricula and lively and innovative teaching techniques in the classroom.” Participant H, recipient of several awards of excellence, completely revised the Spanish curriculum at her university. According to several interviewees, student motivation could also grow if the students felt that the teacher was excited about having them in class and teaching them a new language (PC, PK), if the teacher could convince them that they were going to learn essential communication skills that would benefit them for the rest of their lives (PG), or if the students saw a passionate teacher who wanted to give them a gift that would widen their world (PH). Participant I believed that an excellent teacher would have to be both pragmatic, since not all students are highly motivated to meet yet another graduation requirement, and energetic so that his or her energy would become contagious to students who might not have that energy when they come to class.

Knowing her students’ background well prompted Participant E to make sure that she and her colleagues would not focus on academic Spanish too much in their teaching. Her university was a Hispanic serving institution, and she mentioned that many of her students were heritage speakers who could understand and speak Spanish, “but they probably only know the informal register in most cases.” She believed that knowing

one's heritage students' backgrounds well could contribute to offering the language classes in the context the students needed to receive it in. Participant D often worked with Teaching Assistants from all parts of the world and helped them understand the needs of American students in language learning in relation to their culture: "Their culture needs to be acknowledged in a very positive way" (PD).

Another aspect of excellence of teaching mentioned by Participant D was that a good teacher would need to be "hyper-organized, ahead of the game," on the one hand, and at the same time "know how to give over the reins to the student." She regularly set out "an obstacle race" for her students through which they had to progress. "It is hyper-scaffolded and yet, at the same time, they're not sitting comfortably in their seats, listening to a teacher" (PD). A good teacher needs to organize classes that are dynamic. However, no matter how dynamic instruction might be, Participant K emphasized that good teachers should set realistic goals for their second language classes and not use a phrase like "mastering the language." "I don't even think you master your own language unless you're maybe either William Shakespeare or Oprah Winfrey, or someone like that," let alone a student learning a second language (PL).

Practicing self-reflection. Some of the interviewees declared that self-reflection was important, and this could happen in different shapes and forms. Participant A shared some moments of reflection he regularly had after specific classes, such as "I should have asked this question" or "I should have pushed this student a little harder." He admitted that self-reflection was a big part of his teaching. Self-reflection was also an important activity for Participants N, "I'm constantly learning, constantly improving, and constantly reflecting," and O, "I continue to refine my practice, expand my repertoire, and

continually seek opportunities that benefit my students in ways that are oftentimes nontraditional and out of the box.”

According to Participant P, it was sometimes necessary for her to change the teaching style in certain classes, since she never had “two classes that are exactly the same, and the personalities of the classes are always very different.” Many of these personalities were “very talented, well-educated students that come out of the top high schools.” New students could change the dynamics of a class, and when she felt she needed to be “adaptable” in terms of changing her teaching style, she would be.

After experiencing students who were shy and who did not like to say anything out of fear of making mistakes, Participant P at times decided to make a fool of herself in order to get students participate in class. She valued light-hearted reflection on her own practice. “You know you’re not going to be your students’ best friend, but you want to make them feel comfortable. Sometimes, unfortunately, that means doing something ridiculous if that will open them up a little bit.” Participant M also mentioned she needed a good sense of humor in order to get through to students who might otherwise not be engaged. Similar experiences prompted these interviewees to add a little spice to their teaching.

Being committed to lifelong learning. The openness to learn new things from one’s students would characterize an excellent teacher, according to some interviewees. In the case of Participant J, he felt this particularly true for him learning new expressions, “new varieties, new flavors of Spanish.” Languages are dynamic and constantly changing, which includes new words and expressions being added to the lexicon or existing words getting new meanings. Participants D and H also mentioned a willingness

to learn from their students, in their case especially in the field of computer and cellphone technology.

Next to learning from one's students, excellent teachers should also be open to learning from colleagues in the field. Participant F emphasized the importance of attending workshops and conferences in order to work on professional development while establishing "connections, a network of support," and getting fresh ideas about teaching. Participant O declared that she, as a senior member, often learned from junior colleagues in her department. According to Participant A, "being active in the profession, being engaged with others in the profession, and finding out what other people are doing" are key components to excellence. He gave examples of how he, as a teacher of French, would observe classes in German, Japanese, and Chinese in order to learn more about the ways in which these languages were taught. In recent years, he tried to be focused on his individual improvement in the classroom.

Being actively engaged in scholarship. Participant G declared, "Professors worthy of the name should have a passion for research and the discipline required to formulate and disseminate the results of their research through publication." Publishing he viewed as a logical extension of teaching, "professing to a wider audience outside the brick and mortar classroom" (PG). Participant B often made presentations at conferences and published materials for language teachers. Participant D annually gave workshops and webinars, which made for good connections and constructive remarks from colleagues. Participant E did a lot of research of teaching styles and Participant H presented at national conferences. Participant I organized workshops for area high school

language teachers and spoke in their classes because he believed in partnerships between language educators at all levels.

Best Practices in the Second Language Classroom

Research sub-question 2 was, *What practices do exceptional second language teachers use that they think contribute to their effectiveness?* Although Participant B initially declared, “I don’t like the term *best practices*, because I don’t think there are best practices,” all second language teachers who were interviewed were excited to talk about the practices they used in the classroom that could be conducive to student learning. Five themes emerged from the interview data: *the use of technology in the classroom, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor.*

Use of technology in the classroom. More than half of the interviewees referred to a good use of technology in the classroom as instrumental in enhancing student learning. Participant A mentioned that second language teachers should “all *learn* technology and all *use* technology, but not at the expense of any other aspects of teaching and learning” (emphasis by speaker). In the view of Participant E, a hybrid class which meets face to face once a week, would be “ideal in terms of technology in the classroom because we can meet as a group.” She would find it extremely challenging to teach her language courses entirely online, because “they would be difficult to teach without meeting as a class” (PE).

Participant O also had reservations about teaching entirely online, but for a different reason: “because I love being with students.” When she would introduce an activity in class, “it’s typically through a means of technology because I’m a visual

learner, and so I tend to gravitate toward illustrations that are visual” (PO). Writing activities were projected with a document camera for all to see and review. Student presentations were often reinforced by technology “as they choose to bring it in: audio, visual—typically not more than that” (PO). Like Participant O, Participant D used PowerPoint to explain new concepts. The objectives for a certain class would be visible on the screen, as well as the warmup questions that the students had seen earlier on the course’s Blackboard site. New information would be presented “in an as simplistic form as possible, but always, always contextualized” (PD). There would be no deductive grammar presented in the classroom: “Any of the deductive grammar is going to be happening outside of the classroom, online” (PD).

Technology was used in Participant K’s classes in order “to make the experiences in the classroom as authentic as possible.” She found many diverse realia from different cultures that could be brought into the classroom through the Internet. Besides, programs such as Skype could make classroom experiences also more interactive (PK). Participant C recommended two apps to her students: Quizlet and Second Life. Quizlet, for instance, can test the students’ knowledge of words and phrases, presenting them in the form of games. “It helps [the students] memorize, not just words but sentences, quick expressions. I like anything that’s really fast for them” (PC). Second Life has language games in which students are encouraged to use expressions in the language they are acquiring. “I like those things that are fun and useful” (PC).

Enhancing student motivation. The interviewed second language teachers used a variety of classroom practices to enhance student motivation. Participant A actually saw motivating students as one of the key practices in his classroom. He liked

description games, where the students had to describe something to their speaking partner, or the newlywed game, where they got five minutes to learn as much from their partner as they could. When they realized they could earn points for each right answer, “they [were] much more motivated about things that they [were] interested in” (PA). For students in Participant I’s classes, film nights were organized three times per semester. They could earn extra credit for attending, which “is a good motivation for them” (PI). Participant H motivated her students by giving them a colored popsicle stick each time they contributed to the discussion. These would stay on the desk during the class session, so they were very visible. “And that’s the way I encourage participation” (PH).

PARTS was an acronym used by Participant L in order motivate his students to perform in the culture they were studying—PARTS stands for place, audience, role, time, and script. “A lot of Americans have a pop-eye approach to life, you know, I am what I am, and that is all that I am. In Chinese class it has to be, I am whomever I am talking to” (PL). The students in Participant G’s classes were exposed to useful activities in the classroom with the Total Physical Response approach. “I didn’t carry that nearly as far as a good modern language teacher would do, but at the same time, I felt that I was being a little bit innovative as far as the Latin classroom was concerned” (PG). In the process, he and his students were having a lot of fun.

Participant F, and many others with her, saw a communicative approach to second language acquisition as very motivating to students. Her students were “constantly engaged with the language from the beginning” (PF). She also invited many native speakers from the Latino community to her classes in order to speak with students about their experiences. And because there was a huge Hispanic population close to the

university, she did not have any problems finding people to invite (PF). Participant E also invited native speakers to her classes, even at the beginners' level. She decided not to overcorrect her students, because "if a native speaker can piece together what [the students] are saying, that's pretty good" (PE). Being understood by native speakers gave an enormous boost to her students' motivation to continue learning.

Backwards planning was a practice used by Participants D and K to help students stay excited about language learning. She listed in her lesson plan what she would expect her students to be able to do at the end of the lesson, things they had not been able to do at the beginning of the class. According to her, "you have to have very realistic objectives in the sense that less is more. If you overpopulate your objectives, you won't get a single one that's satisfied" (PD). Then she would look at the end of the lesson and ask herself, "How are the students going to demonstrate that they've satisfied those objectives?" That is the reason why it is called backwards planning, because the teacher looks at the end product first, "not just for the purpose of the teacher or facilitator knowing that in fact those objectives have been met, but almost, almost more importantly, for the sake of the student to be able to say, 'Yes, I can do this'" (PD). The fact that the students would leave the classroom with this knowledge was "very empowering" and "extremely dynamic" (PD).

Students could also be motivated through task-based assessments. Participant K gave her students assessment activities on a daily basis. Her instruction was task-based "so that the tasks [were] designed according to whatever the mode or modes of communication [were] that [the students were] supposed to use" (PK). Her students knew what the expectations were, often with the help of a formal rubric. Rubrics for

assessment activities were also used by Participant O and shared with her students, “and they range from the verbal to the non-verbal to content, length, time management, in a comprehensive way.” Before her students made presentations, they would have to submit something online in written or recorded format “in order to allow those learners who do not perform well in a presentational mode to have another way of also successfully submitting their materials” (PO). Participant O noticed in her classes that the aspect her students had been the most excited about was “when they can own the material, make it their own.”

Facilitating a student-centered class. Participant P’s students, who were “talented, well-educated, and . . . out of the top high schools,” were very competitive in her classes. She would make sure that she, as a teacher, was not the focus of the class. She demanded from her students that they did the talking most of the time: “You have to talk every day, no matter what” (PP). She was able to get her students excited about participating in a second language classroom as well, because, as she put it, “where else are you talking about your family, your friends, what diet you eat, what you do for fun? It’s almost like dating, right?” Participant P was happy with the fact that she did not have “a very traditional classroom.” There was always something extraordinary going on in her classes.

It was also Participant I’s goal to make his classes learner-oriented, but he found it hard to put that in practice, even “impossible many times.” Many of his current students did not have the same level of academic preparation as they had at the previous institution where he was employed. His current students were first generation college students, who worked in addition to going to school, and sometimes had families, “so

they have a lot of competing demands on their time and their energy” (PI). In class, they tended to be quiet and oftentimes disengaged, so it was a great challenge for Participant I to get them excited about learning and to make them responsible for their learning, too. Therefore, Participant I usually began his classes more teacher-oriented and then tried to make them in the process, little by little, more learner-oriented.

Many students in Participant J’s intermediate-low classes were there because of a General Education core requirement at his college. New vocabulary and grammar would be introduced via online videos, and “the classroom is very much a place and time for practice” in which everybody would be involved (PJ). He tried to make the students comfortable using their fluency level of the second language they were studying: “They need to realize that they’re not going to be officially able to say everything, far from everything, but to get them to try to use the Spanish that they have in a realistic way with realistic expectations” (PJ).

Providing timely and constructive feedback. According to Participant M, an important practice in her second language classroom was giving timely and useful feedback to students. Depending on the type of assignment, her feedback might be more or less detailed. She used different sorts of error codes in her written feedback to students. “What I struggle with is how to encourage student to pay attention to the feedback. That’s a little hard” (PM). According to Participant K, “a lot of feedback is really important as we help our students make progress so that they are taking ownership in the learning process and are able to talk about what they are able to do.”

Participants A and H also declared that giving constructive feedback to students about their grade for an assessment activity was essential. According to Participant A,

“in America, we assign a grade to a student, not to a student’s work, which is frustrating because in Europe, as you know, you’re never giving a grade to a student, it’s always to a student’s work.” Students in Europe would not see a grade as having any reflection on who they are as people, whereas in the United States a grade would often be regarded as a personal evaluation of the student by the teacher. Therefore, teachers in the United States would need to take time to convince their students that the grade they got had been based on their work, not on their person (PA).

The students in Participant N’s class were not graded by their teacher. Instead, “they give themselves a grade” (PN). They put a portfolio together of all the work they had done, and at regular intervals Participant N discussed these portfolios with them. The students reflected on what they thought they had done well and where they wanted to improve. “I’m giving them feedback, and they are reflecting on that feedback and on their self-evaluation of where they think they are” (PN).

Use of humor. Participant E declared that she did not always take herself too seriously, which was acknowledged by her students on evaluation forms. “We’re not brain surgeons,” she mentioned during the interview, “we’re teaching language, not saving or killing somebody” (PE). Participant M taught both traditional and nontraditional students, most of whom were first generation, who “come to college not really prepared to be in college.” She strongly believed in doing interactive or communicative activities in class and often told stories about herself so that when students were called up to talk about their lives, they would have her as an example. Participant M’s stories could be quite entertaining, and she was “very happy to make fun of [herself] in class.” Being flexible and enthusiastic, besides having a good sense of

humor, were practices she often used in class to get students excited. Also the students in Participant P's classes liked her sense of humor, which she, for example, showed on April Fool's Day, pretending to give a "stupid, ridiculously hard test," but if the students simply read her instructions until the very end, which they should, then they would realize that it was just a reading exercise.

Philosophies of Second Language Teaching

Research sub-question 3 was, *What are the philosophies of teaching used by exceptional second language teachers?* In responding to this question, Participants B, D, and L, declared that it would be better to talk about theories of *acquisition* rather than teaching, since "language cannot be taught" (PB). Teachers would not really teach the language; instead, "they teach people to *do* things in the language" (PL). Teachers would create "the conditions in which language can be acquired" (PD). Most of the others said that they combined aspects of several theories in their teaching. "I don't necessarily adhere to one specific theory because I don't think that there's one specific theory that can work for each and every group" (PP). All interviewees, however, discussed the principles by which they were guided in their instruction. Four themes emerged from the interview data: *standards set by teachers' associations*, *cultural sensitivity in one's teaching*, *use of comprehensible input*, and *emphasis on improving communication*.

Standards set by teachers' associations. Many participants referred to the standards set by the national organization ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. "They [ACTFL] have become the staples in our curriculum with their principles for foreign language teaching" (PO). This interviewee, as well Participant M, referred in particular to "The Five Cs," the five competencies

ACTFL published in 1999 and which could function as “the 21st-century skills map for foreign language teaching” (PO): communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. Out of those five, Participant N highlighted “The Three Ps of Culture” (products, practices, and perspectives), which she asked students to observe when analyzing a given culture.

The publication of the ACTFL standards for the 21st century led to the *Standards for Classical Language Learning* document, and following these guidelines in his teaching was “easy, fun, and productive,” according to Participant G. ACTFL, in collaboration with the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), also put proficiency guidelines together called *Can-Do Statements*, which were mentioned by Participants A and B. Participant A knew about several states that had developed their own extensive set of Can-Do Statements, some of which he used in his own teaching because they were “really one of the best.”

Cultural sensitivity in one’s teaching. Next to references to the ACTFL standards on culture, several participants mentioned various other forms of including culture in their teaching. Participant L called his approach to teaching “performed culture, which is supported by the idea that language is a social event.” He saw socialization as an important way of acquiring a language and the ability to communicate in that language. However, learning an Asian language in the context of American culture could give rise to problems. As an example, he mentioned the difference in cultural behavior between the United States and the Far East when it comes to greeting people on the street. Many people in the United States greet strangers on the street whereas that would be totally wrong in China. “If you start trying to greet them and

everything, you will ruin any opportunity in the future because they get really uncomfortable with that” (PL). Although the socioeconomic situation of many of their students would not allow for them joining a study abroad program, Participants F and H, nevertheless, encouraged their students to consider it, because the benefits of having studied in another culture would be invaluable.

Participant O based her philosophy of teaching in part on “interculturality,” or intercultural competence: “My theoretical foundation is probably one that still goes back to some of the old giants ... and then developed into interculturalists, who are also, at least in part, foreign language based. I'm thinking of Alvino Fantini, for example.”

Participant K was a member of a task force that had done research on interculturality and that would come out with their new guidelines very soon. A new way of “looking at students’ development of interculturality” would be really helpful “as we try to provide effective instruction and really strong programs across the country” (PK).

Both Participants A and N leaned heavily towards the sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky. In this view, students socially construct their knowledge when working with others. Participant A emphasized his affiliation with activity theory, one of the tenets of sociocultural theory, whereby students put in all their “cognitive energy” in order to acquire a particular language. “They use each other to show what they can do by themselves and what they can do with help, and that helps them grow” (PN). Participant D also promoted that kind of community feeling among her students: “There has to be the willingness to be together, a curiosity about each other and about the world.” In her department, they established e-pal connections with students in Russia and used online conversations in a variety of languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, French,

and German. Participant D made those opportunities part of her curriculum because “they are really language acquisition moments.”

Use of comprehensible input. Five interviewees mentioned Stephen Krashen, “one of the old giants that we learned about in the 90s” (PO), as the educational researcher whose ideas greatly influenced their philosophy of teaching. Krashen presented a model, called “ $i + 1$ ” (PN), which refers to teachers challenging their students with a language level that is one step above the level they master (PE, PF). A special aspect of the comprehensible input theory is the “affective filter” (PC). When this filter is high, students “just freeze” and may be hindered in their learning, but when the filter is low, “they’re relaxed and they can act silly” (PC). Therefore, Participant C would try hard to keep the affective filter in her classes as low as possible.

There were two interviewees who had some reservations regarding the effectiveness of comprehensible input. Participant G suggested that it could be more effective “with younger learners, who are learning their second language in something more like the way they learned their native language,” than with adult learners. By contrast, Participant A put a big question mark by the whole concept of comprehensible input. “Comprehensible, to whom? And how do you know it’s comprehensible to anyone, let alone input?” (PA). He noticed a resurgence of the popularity of comprehensible input among teachers and was wondering “if that’s alarming or not” (PA).

Emphasis on improving communication. Almost all interviewees used the word “communicative” to describe one of their philosophies of instruction. For Participant J, the language classes he taught had to be communicative, focusing on

comprehension and expression. His goal was to make his teaching “hands-on, practical, and useful” so that his students would be comfortable using the language. Participant I preferred a balance between a structural approach and a communicative approach: “a structural approach to establish the bones or the skeleton and a communicative approach to practice it and to put the language into use.” Participant B also taught communicatively, and he defined communication as “expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning in a given context.”

When Participant F got hired, she felt the need to change the language program at her college into a more communicative one, and in order to do so she implemented more practicum opportunities for the students through internships, added benchmarks into the program and a final interview at the end of the senior year. After that, her department graduated students “who the community is impressed with and the employers are impressed with” (PF). Immersion would be the best way for students to become communicative in a language, according to Participant N. However, “the reality is we are in a classroom, but I try to do it as best as I can” (PN).

Participant G saw teachers as the people who had been called “to wage war against the rising tide of barbarism,” not in an ethnic sense but in the sense of helping humans prevent from reverting to an animal state. “We want to be the best humans we can be, and that means the best communicators” (PG). Along similar lines, Participant E expressed her views on the importance of language among humans: “I personally believe that language is what makes us human beings. It’s this unique characteristic of human beings. I want my students to marvel at language.”

Theories of Second Language Learning

Research sub-question 4 was, *What theories of language learning do exceptional second language teachers use?* The same three participants who had some reservations about the term *philosophy of teaching* were not happy with the term *theory of learning*, either. According to Participant L, “there is no such thing as a way of learning. We all work with the same human brain, so the learning process is fairly set.” Instead, one would need to refer to ways of studying, ways of approaching, and ways of getting information (PL).

Participant D preferred the term *language acquisition*, “because that’s what it’s all about.” She specifically mentioned a book by educator Bill VanPatten (2003), called *Input to Output*, which she used in her methods class, in which his thoughts on language acquisition are explained. Participant B would also rather talk about language acquisition, which he described as a process taking place in the mind: “You’ve got language learning in the head, which is acquisition, and then you’ve got skill development and communicative abilities building up, which are a separate set of processes that take place through interaction.” Yet, all interviewees talked about the elements that go into language learning, or language acquisition, from the perspective of the students. Four main themes emerged from the interview data: *one-size-does-not-fit-all approach*, *learning through experience*, *self-directed learning*, and *organized chaos in the class*.

One-size-does-not-fit-all approach. Half of the interviewees mentioned that they would take the different learning styles of their students into account in their teaching. Participant I did not think “there is any one particular theory or approach that

works well for [the students]. I think it's a combination of them." That is why he usually included in his teaching different prompts for more visual, auditory, and tactile learners. Similarly, Participant F designed "different activities that meet the needs of most learners. You won't get everybody, but *most* learners" (emphasis by speaker).

Participant K added to this that "all instruction should include activities that appeal to all learners' needs and styles: auditory, visual physical movement, etcetera, included in a variety of ways to use and experience second language learning." She claimed that excellent teachers know how to do these things, based on their understanding "of learning theory, second language acquisition, research-based best practices for teaching languages" (PK). Students in Participants C and P's classes were asked at the beginning of the semester to identify what kind of learner they were. Participant C would always tell her students, "I am a visual learner. I need to see the word, and I need to see a shoe or something." So, her students would need to let her know what approach worked best for them. According to Participant P, if her students needed mechanical examples over and over again, she would provide those for them. "Even if you're one student out of 16, I can still provide [those] for you. I over-plan my lessons, which I'm sure is common among teachers" (PP).

Participants J and P uploaded their class presentations on their university's online learning environment. At Participant J's college, all students had access to his PowerPoints: "So, if they are more visual learners, they can look at the PowerPoints afterwards to double check they understood everything" (PJ). Participant P uploaded worksheets ahead of time onto her online site, so that her students would be able to look at them before class, especially the tactile learners. Participant O made sure that all

different types of learners would be acknowledged in her course syllabi. During the interview, she talked about some of her nontraditional learners, who “need to be accommodated in different ways than the millennials often times.”

Learning through experience. Students in Participant P’s classes had to give group presentations about grammar points discussed in class. “There are things that you think you know, that you realize you really didn’t know until you had to teach them yourself” (PP). Explaining concepts to classmates was a way of learning that worked great for her students. One of the ways in which Participant O facilitated student learning was by giving them learning opportunities where “the theory, the knowledge, can be put into practice and become embodied knowledge, embodied skill, and embodied practice.” In class, for instance, students watched a short film, dissected it, and interpreted it. The goal was then for her students to make a short film like the one they studied “in order to understand what it feels like to make it” (PO). Participant L found Zull and Coleman’s concept of a learning cycle very applicable to his working with students. “For someone to learn something, you need two things: You need prior knowledge and you need experience,” he declared. A teacher should then give the students the right experience, as well as the right dose of that experience.

Self-directed learning. Some of the classes taught by Participant O were in hybrid format, which promoted self-directed learning. Her students did “a lot of self-directed individual and team work, project focused and product oriented” (PO). She had developed a practice in her courses that she modeled and explained, after which the students would have to produce it on their own. Students were sometimes paired up with authors whose work they imitated and did a spin on, after which there would be a Skype

session with the authors in which the final product was discussed. These cognitive and creative processes stimulated learning among her students.

Participant N was also in favor of teacher hybrid classes, but at her university they were only allowed to teach either face-to-face classes or completely online classes. The students in her online General Education classes were not very motivated or self-regulated, so she needed to “create the independent learner” (PN), which was a struggle since her students were used to having things done for them. Because Participant M ran one program on two campuses, she offered her upper-level classes in blended format. With Internet tools, such as ThinkLink, she hoped her students would enjoy becoming more independent in their learning. “It also gives them a practice on something else that I emphasize, which is developing good research skills” (PM).

Organized chaos in the class. On the end-of-semester evaluation forms, Participant J often read comments from his students about how much they had learned in his classes. “My classes appear to be organized chaos,” he said in the interview. The students interrupted each other all the time but they participated. They asked questions of each other, “not always in a nice, orderly format,” but there was trust and respect towards each other (PJ). The high level of energy in the classroom and the relaxed atmosphere helped students learn. A measure of chaos was also typical of Participant D’s classes, which she qualified as being “a very physical space.” Her students confronted each other, “actually standing in each other’s spaces, and talking to teach other” (PD). This resembled real communication, which could be chaotic as well.

Summary

A basic qualitative study was designed in order to identify, describe, and gain insight into the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers on their own qualities, practices in the classroom, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. The transcripts of the semi-structured interviews held with 16 participants who met the selection criteria were analyzed through threefold coding: open coding, axial coding, and the construction of themes. The findings demonstrate that the main research question with its four sub-questions was answered.

The qualities of excellence these 16 award winners recognized in themselves and others are *loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship*. The best practices these teachers demonstrated in their second language classrooms include *the use of technology, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor*. The philosophies of second language teaching the teachers felt connected to are *the standards set by teachers' associations, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, the use of comprehensible input, and an emphasis on improving communication*. The theories of second language learning the participants adhered to include *a one-size-does-not-fit-all approach, learning through experience, self-directed learning, and organized chaos in the class*.

Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the findings, also in relation to the reviewed literature, the limitations of the study, the implications of the findings for practice, and will provide recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify, describe, and understand the perspectives award-winning second language teachers have regarding their qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. Discovering these perspectives has provided valuable insight into the ways languages are taught and learned at institutions of postsecondary education. The study was of an exploratory nature and was designed and implemented in accordance with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015). The data were obtained through semi-structured phone or Skype interviews.

Sixteen second language teachers participated in the study, 10 women and six men. The total number of 16 met the saturation criteria for a qualitative interview study (Guest et al., 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The participants worked at different colleges and universities all over the country and were involved with the following languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish.

All of the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The interviewees received a copy of their verbatim transcript via email so that they would be able to check the transcript for accuracy and suggest corrections, if any, before the data were analyzed. Twelve of the 16 teachers who had been interviewed responded to this request, some with brief comments, others with elaborate clarifications of what they had intended to say. The interview data were analyzed through threefold coding: open coding, axial coding,

and the construction of themes. The findings demonstrate that the main research question with its four sub-questions has been answered.

This current chapter will discuss these findings, also in relation to the reviewed literature, as well as address the limitations of the study, the implications of the findings for the practice of second language teaching and learning, and the recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Findings

A problem had been perceived that there was no consensus as to what makes for excellent teaching in the second language classroom. For that reason, experts in the field were interviewed in order to shed light on what they understood excellent teaching to be. The themes that had emerged from analyzing the interview data answered the central research question and its four sub-questions.

The central research question was, *What are the self-reported qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning of exceptional second language teachers in the twenty-first century?* Before the participants responded to the four interview questions, they described the institution of postsecondary education they were serving, the culture of the school, the size of the department, and the students they had in their classes. These pieces of information benefitted the researcher in better understanding the responses from the interviewees and in gaining insight into the ways they served their students.

The first interview question was, *What are, in your opinion, the qualities needed to excel as a second language teacher in the twenty-first century?* The six themes that

emerged from the interview data were *loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship*. The second interview question was, *What practices do you use that are conducive to student learning and to teaching excellence?* Five themes emerged from the data, including *the use of technology in the classroom, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor*. The third interview question was, *What philosophies of teaching do you adhere to in your instruction?* There were four themes that emerged from the data: *standards set by teachers' associations, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, use of comprehensible input, and emphasis on improving communication*. The fourth interview question was, *What theories of language learning do you believe in?* Four main themes emerged from the data, including *one-size-does-not-fit-all approach, learning through experience, self-directed learning, and organized chaos in the class*.

In the next two sections, these findings will be discussed: first, internally, with references to the theoretical framework in which the study was grounded, and second, in relation to the literature reviewed.

Discussion of the Findings

The internal discussion of the findings will be centered around the four interview questions and will have references to the theoretical framework, discussed in Chapter 2. For each question, one or more themes that have emerged from the interview data will be highlighted and discussed in context.

First Interview Question about Qualities of Excellence

Concerning the exceptional qualities award-winning second language teachers perceived to possess themselves, some of these were of such a general nature that they could also apply to teachers in general, not exclusively to second language teachers, and some interviewees commented to that effect as well. Among those were *loving one's neighbor, being committed to lifelong learning, practicing self-reflection, and being actively engaged in scholarship*. The loving kindness displayed by many interviewees towards their students was heartwarming. Participant C made special arrangements for off-campus programs in Spanish in order to make it doable for her students. Many of her students were married and had children. "Seventy percent of my students are Mormons, so they're very family oriented. They have their own trials and their own baggage that they bring to the classroom" (PC). Thirty percent of Participant M's students were of Native American origin, many of them older and not really ready to be in college. "You have to be prepared to meet them where they are when they come to you" (PM). At her institution, it is very important to accept the students as they are. Participant I mentioned that he was very empathic towards his students as well. His university is one of the Hispanic serving institutions of the country, and the students usually work, next to going to school, and have families, "so they have a lot of competing demands on their time and their energy" (PI). To him, an excellent teacher "has to be willing to expend energy that far surpasses the energy that the students may be devoting to the class." He was honest in admitting that this could be a real challenge at times, but still, because of his love for teaching and for his students, he did not find it hard to make accommodations so that everyone would get the best out of his classes.

A unique side of loving one's neighbor was provided by Participants F and J: empowering the women students in their classes, each one in their own way. Participant F worked at a predominantly white institution and had seen the Latino population grow expansively the last decade or so, which had prompted her and her colleagues to change their pedagogy to better meet the needs of their students. For her, social justice orientation was an extremely important topic to address in her classes. "I tend to focus on race in particular because my area of expertise is the African influences in Latin American and francophone countries. So I incorporate the voices of Afro-Latinos in most of my classes" (PF). By addressing this in class and by making connections between marginalized groups in Latin America and marginalized groups in the United States, she empowered her students at the women's college she was serving. In this way, the classroom could become "a site of contestation and increased understanding about what it means to operate in the center and the margin" (Sheared, 2006, p. 190).

Participant J worked at a small rural private college whose students would come from a very conservative Christian background. Time and again, he felt the need to encourage his female students, who would tend to adhere to the traditional gender roles, "to believe in themselves and to speak up and to realize that their voice is just as valid as the voice of their male counterparts" (PJ). He found this challenging at times, but he was actively trying to imprint on them—"I don't want to say 'push'"—that "they have a role, a purpose, a calling in life" (PJ). In this way, he tried to support women learning "through transforming culture ... and addressing diversity" (Bierema, 2006, p. 149).

The two other themes that had emerged from the data regarding the first interview question were more specifically connected to the profession of second language teachers,

namely *having expertise in the language taught and being well-versed in second language pedagogy*. Like Participant I, also Participant E's university was a large Hispanic serving institution, with an extensive Spanish program. Her university did not have a language graduation requirement, so all her students were either minoring or majoring in Spanish or were motivated to take Spanish classes as an elective. At her school, there were special Spanish classes for heritage speakers, although those students were not forced to enroll in them. She and her colleagues believed in the concept of *multicompetence*: "Can you use the language in the context you need to?" (PE). She would refrain from using academic Spanish if that was not the variety of the language her students were familiar with. Participant E had also done research on the ways in which children learn versus how adults learn language, and she found "it's completely different."

Participant N supported Participant E's claim that an excellent teacher knows that language learning is different for different age groups. Participant N used to teach middle and high school before she taught at the college level, and in that situation she discovered that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method would work fine when teaching vocabulary only, but that is didn't really work well with college "because the class that I'm teaching is to get them better specifically for speaking and for writing, and so I don't teach vocabulary, for example. They construct their own vocabulary lists that are meaningful for them" (PN).

This issue, however, was controversial, since some of the interviewees strongly contested that all language acquisition happens the exact same way, whether it is the learner's first language or second, and regardless of the learner's age. Participant B, for

instance, declared that “in all contexts, there's a fundamental similarity between all language contexts, whether it's first, second, or subsequent language acquisition. And that is that they all require the same underlying things. They all require input.” He continued to say that in terms of getting familiar with multiple languages, linguistically speaking, “the process is no different for second and third language learners from first language learners” (PB).

Participant H, by contrast, mentioned that she had a daughter attending a Spanish high school class, where they were exposed to the language through TPR, and because her daughter had learned quite a bit of Spanish via her, she was horrified because she felt that the people designing Spanish classes at her daughter’s high school did not really understand what it takes to learn a second language. Having no homework might resemble one’s first language acquisition, but according to Participant H, in a situation where the language studied is not often spoken, “one of the things that predicts fluency in the language is the hours of contact, the hours that you are using the language.” Because of this, she saw it as one of her qualities as a teacher to encourage her students to take advantage of every opportunity to learn Spanish outside of class, be it through watching movies on Netflix or taking reading classes. After all, “if you have had the experience of trying to master a second language as an adult, no doubt you found it to be a challenge quite unlike your first language experience” (Fromkin et al., 2014, p. 430). Whatever the learning situation students find themselves in, according to Fromkin et al. (2014), one has to make a conscious effort to stay abreast of the class materials in one’s own way. “It usually requires conscious attention, if not intense study and memorization, to become proficient in a second language” (p. 430).

Second Interview Question about Best Practices

Concerning the practices award-winning second language teachers use in their classroom, most of those could also be viewed as being applicable to the classroom in general than solely meant for the second language classroom. They included *the use of technology in the classroom, enhancing student motivation, facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and constructive feedback*, and *the use of humor*. It was, however, in the details of these themes that the specific language-related applications could be worked out.

“Some people are very talented language learners. Others are hopeless. Most people fall somewhere in the middle” (Fromkin et al., 2014, p. 430). Success may depend on a large number of factors, including the student’s age and motivation. Most interviewees talked about different strategies they would employ in order to enhance student motivation. Exposing students to native speakers or bringing the cultures into the classroom via the Internet were well-proven methods. Participant F had native speaker fluency in Spanish, but she had not been in the culture. “I acknowledge that it is a language and a culture that is not innately mine. Because of that, I’m constantly trying to make sure that the students are exposed to native speaker presence” (PF). For that reason, she invited a lot of native speakers to her classes. And since the Latino population at her school had recently grown incrementally, it was not hard for her to find native speakers. In addition, the college had a Hispanic club, and members of this club were scheduled to have conversation round tables either weekly or monthly with Participant F’s students.

Technology can be used in the classroom in a variety of ways. Summer would be the time when Participant P traveled to Italy to record new files with native speakers for her students. “They become the listening exercises that we use in class” (PP). Back on campus, she would write questions for the students to practice with. “Then those questions—the students know them ahead of time, they're written into the syllabus, we talk about them at the beginning of the semester—become the oral exam questions at the end of the semester” (PP).

Participant D also brought native speakers into the classroom via technology. At her university, they used a program called Talk Abroad. Through it, the students could talk with native speakers in other countries. “We did it with French last year. We're doing it with Arabic, Chinese, French, and German this year. Students love it because they get this one on one with a real person who understands how to be a sympathetic listener” (PD). These were moments in a semester in which language acquisition was really taking place.

The use of cellphone technology was explored by Participant A. He had a native speaker work with his entire class to do a scavenger hunt all across campus, “and they had to communicate with the other persons on their team via chat. This was a Chinese class, so it was in Chinese” (PA). Although Participant G had put many of his Latin teaching materials online, he had some reservations about an exclusive use of online learning. He was concerned about the mindset of many of today's students when it comes to fully relying on technology. “When it means moving away even from reading whole sentences and paragraphs, and instead speaking and reading in soundbites, and snippets, and Twitters, and tweets, then the effects here are profound” (PG). He used

cellphone technology himself as well, but only in order to schedule tutorial conversations over the phone with his students.

Third Interview Question about Philosophies of Teaching

Concerning the philosophies of teaching adhered to by award-winning second language teachers, four major themes emerged from the interview data. These included *standards set by teachers' associations, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, use of comprehensible input, and emphasis on improving communication*. Many methods of second language teaching have been developed over the years, and although these methods can be quite different from each other, experts believe that there is not one single method that would be the best of all for teaching a second language. "All methods have something to offer, and virtually any method can succeed with a gifted teacher who is a native or near-native speaker, motivated students, and appropriate teaching materials" (Fromkin et al., 2014, p. 312).

This view on the multiplicity of applicable teaching methods was echoed by Participants C, O, and P. "In principle, I think I am somebody who really is more eclectic, rather than subscribing to one theory," said Participant O, who taught German to a rather traditional body of students. Participant C, who taught Spanish to mainly nontraditional students, also commented along similar lines. "I think you usually have to be eclectic and flexible, and you need to pay attention to your students. Different levels of classes and different types of classes require different approaches" (PC). Participant P, who taught Italian to competitive students, expressed it in this way: "I think there is a difference between the theory behind what you're doing and what you're actually doing. I

don't necessarily adhere to one specific theory because I don't think that there's one specific theory that can work for each and every group.”

Considering the development of philosophies of second language teaching, it was striking to note how many interviewees had, in one way or another, contributed to ACTFL conferences over the years, either by giving presentations or by participating in working groups that would develop new teaching standards. Participant N, for instance, commented on her involvement with the organization. “I am a past president of my state organization, I always go to the conferences, I do workshops, and I do sessions” (PN). Participant F was one of the ACTFL conference organizers a few years ago and also co-authored a book on current issues. “I contributed and wrote several blurbs that are included in the book” (PF). Participant K was convinced that future second language teachers would need to familiarize themselves with the core ACTFL standards, which had been developed out of thorough recent research into the field. “We want to make sure that all beginning teachers possess [them] before they begin teaching. We really want to move the profession. We want to move it along” (PK). She, therefore, suggested that at the hiring process, school administrators should check where potential candidates stand when it comes to familiarity with those professional core standards. In sum, many award-winning teachers had close ties with their professional organizations and some of them helped develop theories of teaching and learning.

Fourth Interview Question about Theories of Learning

Concerning the theories of learning supported by award-winning second language teachers, four major themes emerged from the interview data. These included *one-size-does-not-fit-all approach*, *learning through experience*, *self-directed learning*, and

organized chaos in the class. According to Fromkin et al. (2014), “with some exceptions, adults do not simply pick up a second language. It usually requires conscious attention, if not intense study and memorization, to become proficient in a second language” (p. 430). In order to be successful as a second language learner, it can make a huge difference “whether you are in the country where the language is spoken or sitting in a classroom five mornings a week with no further contact with native speakers” (Fromkin et al., 2014, p. 431).

For that reason, many interviewed second language teachers liked to send their students to the country where the language is spoken, for a shorter or longer period of time. When Participant L’s students wanted to study in China, he introduced them to various tests, since “China is a testing culture. You’ve got to pass a test to do anything you want to do. We teach them how to respond to the testing requirements.” When going thus prepared, his students would be better capable of handling difficult situations. He also made them “learn how to research the learning process” (PL) so that they understood what would be the most helpful to them in Chinese culture. This approach enabled his students to grow more independent and self-directed.

In other countries, the stress level for students could be much lower than in China. At Participant P’s university, “[Italy] is the number one study abroad destination because everybody loves Italy. The food is good and the beaches are good.” Her students could study abroad for a summer, a semester, or a full year. She recommended certain programs to her majors and minors because the less English the local people knew, the more her students would have to use Italian. Participant K had a number of students in her classes who were either minoring in a second language or taking it as their second

major. She found that especially business and pre-med majors benefitted from their study abroad experiences. “They're really trying to get into the culture and pursue their cultural and language experiences that way” (PK). These ventures had been such a great success at her university that they were “bursting at the seams in some of the language programs” (PK). Students understood the lasting value of experiencing another culture firsthand.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature

A study that tries to identify, describe, and understand certain perspectives of exceptional second language teachers is relevant for the field of education, in this case postsecondary education. This section will discuss the relationship between the reviewed literature and the findings of the study, which investigated the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers on their own qualities, practices, philosophies of teaching, and theories of learning. Instead of discussing this in light of the four interview questions, as was done in the previous section, the current discussion will look at the topic comprehensively and will have the following foci: *current findings consistent with reviewed literature*, *aspects from reviewed literature not found in current findings*, and *new findings not mentioned in reviewed literature*.

Current Findings Consistent with Reviewed Literature

All of the main theories of second language learning discussed in Chapter 2 were, in one form or other, addressed by the participants, not always in the same terminology but definitely with matching descriptions. This included the introductory comment in that chapter about there not being one single theory of learning, but instead having a

multitude of models that all contribute to learning in their own unique way (Merriam et al., 2007).

When compared to Grow's model of integrating *self-directed learning* (Grow, 1991/1996), Participant O's students did "a lot of self-directed individual and team work, project focused and product oriented." Some of her German classes were taught in hybrid format through which the students got a lot of practice. Participant O had "developed a practice in [her] courses that [she] models, explains, allows them to understand, and then they need to produce it on their own."

Transformational learning happens when students grow in their understanding of the culture of the language they are studying and are changed in their attitude (Hudelson & Faltis, 1993). Participant L was convinced that his students of Chinese needed much guidance in order not to make a fool of themselves or offend anyone in the culture of China. Instead of his students learning Chinese in the context of American culture, from day one they had to socialize to Chinese culture. This required a change of mindset among his students. "Socialization as the main way of acquiring a language, acquiring the ability to communicate, is a very important component" (PL). If his students were using Chinese in an appropriate way, they would gain access to Chinese culture. If, however, they did not know what the culture was, they would not gain any access to it, or at least not enough in order to do what they wanted to do. The students needed to see "the language as an instrument for accessing culture" (PL).

A *service learning project* is an unusually enriching way for students to combine learning with service (Merriam et al., 2007). Students in Participant C's classes had to take part in service projects while using Spanish. For a number of years, she took her

students to Guatemala to work with Mayan women. “I would teach them vocabulary related to micro-credits, to financing, vocabulary related to conditions of the Mayan women’s lives” (PC). On site, her students had to teach the women how to make soap from scratch and then sell it on the market. In return, “the women had to teach my students about their daily lives, things they cook, things they like, songs, myths, things that they were proud of. So it was a two-way [of learning]” (PC). Students who are involved in projects like these practice their second language fluency and serve their neighbors at the same time.

Some of the interviewees used *embodied learning* in their classes. Participant G was excited about applying Total Physical Response in his Latin courses. “I didn’t carry that nearly as far as a good modern language teacher would do, but at the same time I felt that I was being a little bit innovative as far as the Latin classroom was concerned” (PG). Participant N, on the other hand, mentioned that she had used TPR when teaching middle school and high school Spanish, when the focus was very much on acquiring vocabulary, but she did not think this method was very useful for speaking and writing at the college level. According to her, TPR “doesn’t really work well with college because the class that I’m teaching is to get them better specifically for speaking and for writing, and so I don’t teach vocabulary, for example” (PN).

Narrative learning, finally, is a method of second language learning in which story telling plays a major role (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). It has the potential of being very relevant and stimulating to capture the attention of one’s students. Participant A lived in a part of the country “where people really like stories, it’s part of the way of life.

It's always good to tell a story” (PA). Narratives can help student better understand the content of their study materials and the world they live in.

From the themes that emerged from the interview data regarding the exceptional qualities award-winning second language possessed, almost all of those were also mentioned in the reviewed literature, including *loving one's neighbor*, listed as a best practice (Hooks, 2000; Smith & Carvill, 2000), *having expertise in the language taught*, mentioned by Gibbs (1996) and Schrier (1993), *being well-versed in second language pedagogy*, suggested by Gibbs (1996), *practicing self-reflection*, again suggested by Gibbs (1996), and *being actively engaged in scholarship*, promoted by Gregory (1996). These qualities of exceptional second language teachers were discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

One of the themes that had come out of the literature of best practices in the second language classroom was *student motivation* (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Davidson-Shivers & Rasmussen, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008). Participant I organized special film nights for his French students in order to give them additional motivation. “We don't have a very good turnout, but I do offer extra credit to students for them to come. I think that that's a good motivation for them” (PI). In connection with student motivation, Participant K used task-based assessments to achieve that end. She claimed that “assessment happens every day in the classroom. Those informal assessments that teachers are using, recognizing through their interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive modes what their students are able to do” (PK).

Other themes that had come out of the literature review in this connection, such as *overseas connections* and *cross-cultural understanding*, were associated by the

interviewees more with theories of learning, such as *transformational* and *experiential learning*, than with best practices in the classroom. In addition, the best practices theme of *love in the classroom* from the literature was recognized by the interviewees as one of the exceptional qualities of exceptional teachers: *loving one's neighbor*.

A theme that had been addressed in the reviewed literature but that did not emerge as a major theme shared by all participants was *innovation*. Participant B, however, strongly believed that this was key to exceptional classroom practice. "I think what gets people noticed is that if students and colleagues can see that there is innovation in the instruction going on and that there's student success and student excitement about what they're doing" (PB). Even if a second language teacher would be teaching in a more or less traditional environment, "you can still be an outstanding teacher. It's all about innovation and learner engagement and learner excitement" in one's classes (PB).

Technology in the classroom was a theme mentioned by the interviewees as one of the best practices in the classroom. In the reviewed literature, however, this had been listed as an exceptional quality of exceptional teachers (ACTFL, 2015). Participant P referred to the use of technology in her classroom, albeit with some reservation. "Gamification is this new thing and I don't really know anything about it. I'm interested to learn and sort of terrified because that means even more technology, ugh" (PP). On this topic, Participant M believed that her conference presentations on the use of technology in the classroom might have contributed to her being nominated for an award. "I think it [had] to do with my use of technology in the classroom. And I am somewhat known for that. I've done a number of regional and national, a few international, presentations on using different aspects of technology for assessment" (PM).

Repetition was a theme that had come out of the reviewed literature, mainly in connection with strengthening new ideas and concepts (Modern Language Association, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008). Participant B was the only interviewee who mentioned repetition as a useful practice in class. This, however, did not turn out to be a theme emerging from the interview data as a whole. Participant B mentioned a situation in which he had spent thirty-five minutes telling his students about his family, “which is massive amounts of input, high level, high quality, lots of repetition inside of it. They were hearing these words over and over again in doing basic descriptions” (PB). Then he would ask them to summarize the story they had heard. He believed that this kind of approach would give his students the right tools to talk about their own families later on.

Aspects from Reviewed Literature Not Found in Current Findings

Considering the philosophies of teaching discussed in Chapter 2, it was remarkable that none of the interviewees referred to any of the philosophies that had arisen out of the reviewed literature. No reference was made to Knowles’s concept of andragogy, Illeris’s three-dimensional model, Jarvis’s learning process, or Hase and Kenyon’s concept of heutagogy. A reason for this lack of consistency between the reviewed literature and the current study’s findings could be the fact that the interviewees did not dwell too much on the works of past icons of educational theories but were very practice-oriented and active members of professional organizations that helped develop new teaching practices for the 21st century.

Regarding qualities found in exceptional second language teachers, one aspect that had not been mentioned by any of the interviewees was *servant leadership*. There were several researchers, ranging from a private college president to a public school

principal to a trainer of at-risk teenagers, who wanted to make a case for this type of leadership to be exemplary and conducive to enhancing student learning (Bowman, 2005; Grothaus, 2004; Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Hoekstra, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2007; Taylor et al., 2007).

In terms of best practices in the classroom, one theme that had come out of the reviewed literature but that did not specifically emerge as a theme from the interview data was *simulation*. Simulation was not mentioned at all by any of the participants, although according to some researchers, simulation exercises may be beneficial to students in the sense that they can process real-life situations with their teacher (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

New Findings Not Mentioned in Reviewed Literature

One area in which the study revealed new perspectives on the topic is related to philosophies of teaching. There was no overlap between those philosophies discussed in the reviewed literature and those that emerged from the interview data. First, some interviewees, such as Participants F, M, and P, commented on the fact that they did not really adhere to one particular philosophy, without going into the specifics. Others, such as Participants B, O, and N, were guided in their teaching by the standards put forward by the nation's professional organization of second language teachers, ACTFL. From the themes that had emerged from the interview data, it seemed as if the participants looked at this aspect of their teaching from a very practical standpoint, rather than a theoretical one. Next to *the standards set by teachers' associations*, such as ACTFL, other themes that emerged were *cultural sensitivity in one's teaching*, *the use of comprehensible input*,

and *an emphasis on improving communication*. All of those themes were more fully discussed in the previous section of Chapter 5.

Regarding theories of second language learning held by award-winning teachers, next to the vast overlap of themes, there was one unique theme that was not referred to in the literature but yet mentioned by some of the interviewees: *organized chaos in the class*. Both Participants D and J characterized one of the ways in which their students learned best as chaos in the classroom. According to Participant D, “second language teachers, maybe any teacher but a second language teacher especially, has to be exceedingly organized and yet ironically produce and acknowledge a very productive kind of chaos.” She compared this type of learning in her French classes to real-life communication being chaotic as well, so what better way would there be to prepare one’s students for the real world? Participant J admitted that a similar chaos in his classes had been recognized by his colleagues. He said, “I’ve had professors come in to evaluate my courses, generally because we have to just do that, peer evaluations. Generally, they do not speak Spanish, and according to some of them, my classes appear to be organized chaos” (PJ). Again, as in the real world, people just do not wait for the other person to be finished speaking but they simply interrupt one another. It could almost sound as if one was watching a debate between two presidential candidates in 2016, albeit with one substantial difference: There was respect between the speakers.

Several facets of best practices in the classroom were mentioned by the interviewees that had not been referred to in the reviewed literature: *facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor*. These facets have been adequately addressed in Chapter 4.

Limitations

A basic qualitative study was conducted into the perspectives of second language teachers on their own qualities of excellence, best practices in the classroom, philosophies of second language instruction, and theories of second language learning. The participants had been purposefully sampled from a composite list of teachers working at institutions of postsecondary education who had received one or more awards of excellence from a national or regional professional association. The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and understand these perspectives. The research was designed according to Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015), and the data were collected with the help of semi-structured interviews and analyzed through a threefold system of coding. The themes that emerged from the data answered the research question and its sub-questions satisfactorily.

In spite of the wealth of information gathered through the interviews about everything related to excellent second language teaching and learning, the study was limited in a number of areas. First, the population was restricted to award-winning second language teachers at institutions of postsecondary education, which meant that second language teachers without any awards were not included in the study, although they might be excellent in their field as well. Nor were those included who work at other institutions of education.

Further, none of the teachers working in an overseas context decided to respond to the request to participate. All of the American teachers who did decide to volunteer, however, were serving institutions in different parts of the country, some large research universities, some small private colleges, and others land-grant institutions. They also

appeared to have close ties to the professional organizations by which they were awarded. Elton (1996) criticizes the current practice of extending awards of teaching excellence in the United States, where they have been in existence for about 70 years now, raising the question if teaching in this country has improved over those years. The author adds that awards for teaching are “more likely to reward past excellence than to recognize where excellence is beginning to emerge” (Elton, 1996, p. 39).

The 16 teachers who were willing to participate in the study represented language programs in Chinese (1), French (4), German (1), Italian (1), Latin (1), and Spanish (8). This shows that half of the participants were involved in Spanish programs. There would have been more variety in languages, and probably also in instructional methods, if the invited teachers of Arabic, Dutch, English as a Second Language, Greek, Hawaiian, Hebrew, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Slavic, and Turkish had also consented to be interviewed. Having those other language programs included in the study might have impacted the findings.

The design of the study restricted the way in which the data were collected and analyzed. Because the participants’ colleges and universities were spread out over the entire country, it would have been a challenge to conduct face-to-face interviews with all teachers or to actually observe them in action. Instead, the data were collected by means of interviews held via Skype or over the phone, after which the interview transcripts were analyzed. The data analysis could only be as good as the data collected and was dependent on the information shared by the interviewees. The researcher assumed that the participants were truthful in their responses about their own qualities, best practices in the classroom, philosophies of teaching, and theories of learning.

The study was also limited in the sense that there was one researcher who analyzed all the data. After all, “any given data segment might be viewed differently by two different researchers or even coded using more than one label by a given researcher” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 184). Therefore, it was essential that the discussion of the findings would include “extensive samples of quotes from participants” so that the readers would be convinced that the researcher gave an accurate representation of the interviewed teachers and their situations (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 192).

Finally, unlike common practice in quantitative studies, a basic qualitative study which is exploratory in nature does not lend itself to a broad generalization of the findings. Transferability is limited to exceptional second language teachers, a practice called “internal generalization” (Patton, 2015, p. 719), the type of transferability that applies to teachers in similar situations who were not interviewed.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Generally speaking, qualitative studies describe specific situations and events and often do not lend themselves to generalizations common to quantitative studies. If the findings of a qualitative study have the potential of being transferable, Patton (2015) explains that this might go “from particular cases to others based on similarity of context and conditions” (p. 719). In the case of this study, having a better understanding of the qualities of excellence perceived in award-winning second language teachers, their best practices in the classroom, their philosophies of instruction, and their theories of learning may impact the ways in which other exceptional second language teachers who were not interviewed serve their students at colleges and universities. The principles or practical

lessons learned from the findings may be adapted in certain settings in which those principles can be applied (Patton, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), however, it is not this researcher who has to prove that his findings are applicable to other second language classrooms, but rather “the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298). Similarly, a seamstress may hear and see in a television interview with a famous couturier an exceptional dress designed by him that looks good on a mannequin, which she then tries to recreate herself. It is not up to the interviewer to decide if something exceptional like that can be recreated, but rather up to the seamstress in question, or the potential buyer of the dress for that matter.

The research findings supported the view that second language teachers have to be excellent in their profession, which includes having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, and being committed to lifelong learning. In terms of effectiveness of student learning, the interviewees suggested specific best practices that worked well for them in the classroom, such as an appropriate use of technology, enhancing student motivation in different ways (for instance, through inviting native speakers, backwards planning, and task-based assessments), facilitating a student-centered learning environment, and providing timely and constructive feedback to students.

Considering philosophies of teaching and theories of learning, most interviewed teachers said they would combine aspects of several theories in their classroom practice. Many of them saw value in following the guidelines put forward by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Two participants declared they were part

of a committee that was involved in setting up new standards for specific areas of language learning. All second language teachers might benefit from incorporating the ACTFL standards into their curriculum, a comment often heard during the interviews.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study was unique. Never before had award-winning second language teachers been interviewed about their own qualities of excellence, best practices in the classroom, philosophies of second language instruction, and theories of second language learning. What the study did not cover but what could still be valuable for understanding teaching excellence is, for example, listening to the students' perceptions of those best practices in the classroom. Several interviewees, such as Participants D and J, referred to their students' end-of-semester evaluations. Students do not list everything on those evaluation forms, and an in-depth study of their perceptions, therefore, could lead to more insight into which practices worked well for them and which did not.

New insights could also be gained if the study were replicated in a totally different context, such as in another part of the world. Generally speaking, the United States of America does not have a worldwide reputation for its emphasis of encouraging its students to become fluent in a second language. This is exemplified by the freedom American high schools have to make second language studies an elective rather than mandatory for graduation. Participants M and N, for instance, had many students in their beginners' classes who would still need two or three semesters of Spanish in order to graduate from college because they never took up a second language in high school.

In many parts of the world, especially in Africa and Asia, bilingualism is the norm. According to Fromkin et al. (2014), “approximately half of the people in the world are native speakers of more than one language” (p. 426). It is safe to assume that in these contexts where students are used to learning other languages, best practices in the classrooms may be different than those in a country like the United States, where college students in a second language class at the beginners’ level could well be fluent speakers of their mother tongue only.

Some interviewees, including Participants I and N, mentioned a number of challenges they were faced with when it comes to second language instruction online. Because their schools wanted to offer as many online classes as possible, second language classes had to follow. Research is needed into the benefits and advantages of online second language courses as well as into the possible challenges of this type of instruction, the more so because an increasing number of second language learning programs are offered for free through public libraries nationwide, such as Mango Languages (Dynamic Language, 2013; Mango Languages, n.d.).

Another point that came up during the interviews which could benefit from more research was the conflicting expectations students from different generations sometimes had when they entered the second language classroom of the interviewees. Participant O, in particular, emphasized that she needed to make sure that both the more traditional students and the millennials in her classes would be served equally well. Second language teachers could benefit from guidelines as to how to write syllabi that would cater to different students, not only in terms of learning styles but also in terms of age related expectations.

Finally, a number of interviewees, such as Participants H and N, made clear distinctions between their philosophies of teaching, on the one hand, and their theories of learning, on the other. However, interviewees such as Participants B and D did not. They preferred to talk about language acquisition in a comprehensive way, rather than distinguishing between teaching and learning. Out of the interviews came an interesting controversy regarding this current theory of second language acquisition. Participant D referred to the thoughts on second language acquisition developed by Bill VanPatten (VanPatten, 2003; VanPatten & Williams, 2015) as a guiding principle in her methods class, whereas Participant H, referring to the same author by name, declared that she preferred not use his principles in her classes. The profession could benefit from thorough research into the benefits of using those kinds of principles of second language acquisition in courses at institutions of postsecondary education.

Conclusion

This was an exploratory basic qualitative study into the perspectives of award-winning second language teachers serving institutions of higher education in the United States regarding their own qualities, best practices in the classroom, philosophies of teaching, and theories of language learning. The purpose of the study was to identify, describe, and understand those perspectives. The data were collected by means of semi-structured Skype or phone interviews with 16 second language teachers who had won one or more awards of excellence. During the interview, the participants also described the institution they were serving, the culture of the school, the size of the department, and the students they had in their classes.

In order to enable to structure the interview well, the researcher had divided the central research question into four sub-questions, reflecting the four aspects of the central research question mentioned earlier. Regarding the exceptional qualities award-winning teachers acknowledged they possessed, the single aspect that had emerged from the reviewed literature which had not been mentioned by the interviewees was servant leadership. The other aspects they mentioned, including loving one's neighbor, having expertise in the language taught, being well-versed in second language pedagogy, practicing self-reflection, being committed to lifelong learning, and being actively engaged in scholarship, were all referred to in one way or another by the interviewees, not always as a response to this question about qualities, but definitely at some other point during the interviews.

In terms of best practices in the classroom, one aspect that had emerged from the literature but was not mentioned by the interviewees was simulation. By contrast, there were three facets of best practices which had not been referred to as such by the reviewed literature included facilitating a student-centered class, providing timely and adequate feedback, and the use of humor.

Concerning the philosophies of teaching used by those award winners, none of the philosophies that had come out of the reviewed literature was referred to by the interviewees. Instead, their philosophies seemed to be of a more practical than theoretical nature and included the standards set by teachers' associations such as ACTFL, cultural sensitivity in one's teaching, the use of comprehensible input, and an emphasis on improving communication.

Finally, the themes that had emerged from the reviewed literature regarding the theories of second language learning appeared to be fully supported by the exceptional teachers. There was even one additional theme they mentioned, which had not come out of the literature, namely organized chaos in the class.

The findings as a whole provided valuable insights into the ways languages are currently taught and learned at institutions of postsecondary education in the United States, and although the nature of this basic qualitative study does not lend itself to broad generalization of its findings, the insights gained may enable other second language teachers to establish benchmarks that push their instruction to a higher level.

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APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) and Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Leendert Gerrit Willem van Beek, October 10, 2016

Dr. Gail Hughes, School of Education